



# **The experience of fatherhood post–imprisonment**

Emma Young

Based on her John Sunley Prize winning masters dissertation

## Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Literature review	6
3. Methodology	12
4. Discussion	14
5. Reflection and conclusions	26
Bibliography	28
Appendix A – Discussion of ethical considerations	31
Appendix B – Interview Guide	32

## **Abstract**

The unprecedented growth in the prison population in recent years has led to greater interest in the social cost of imprisonment. This study addresses the social cost of mass imprisonment on father – child relationships and the effect of imprisonment on fatherhood identity. Using qualitative, semi-structured interviews, the experiences of three fathers and their relationships with their children during and after imprisonment are explored. The literature highlights the many positive associations between father – child relationships during imprisonment and successful reintegration away from crime. The less visible impact of imprisonment is on the men’s identities as fathers and the frustration and strain that fathers go through when trying to successfully maintain a relationship with their child. This discussion draws the attention to many of the constraints, inherent to the prison context, which place limitations and barriers on the fathers’ ability to engage with and maintain a relationship with their children. Overall, the main discussion presented within this study focuses on the link between the challenges of imprisoned fatherhood and the impact this then has on men’s identities as fathers.

## 1. Introduction

In the early 1990s, research within the field of penology began to focus on relationships conducted within prison and the social implications of prison on families (Hairston, 1991: 87). During this period societies saw unprecedented growth in prison populations, leading to an increase in the number of people indirectly affected by the social costs of imprisonment (Arditti et al., 2005: 268; Dyer et al., 2012: 20). This interest in the social impact of mass imprisonment has led to a growing body of research looking at the impact of parental imprisonment on children (Roxburg and Fitch, 2013: 1395). In the US the number of imprisoned parents is representative of the general population: an estimated 54 per cent of imprisoned men are parents (Arditti, 2012: 72; Mumola, 2000 cited in Roxburg and Fitch, 2013: 2). Similarly, prisoner surveys of Norwegian prisons indicate that more than half of prisoners have children (Ugelvik, 2014: 157). Whilst it is not known whether this is replicated in the context of the UK, this data highlights the extent to which prison and the family are interconnected and that the experience of being a parent whilst in prison is commonplace (Roxburg and Fitch, 2013: 1395). Despite this there is still limited research on the emotional impact of being an imprisoned parent; or the effect of imprisonment on father–child relationships in particular (Roxburg and Fitch, 2013, 2013: 1395; Dyer et al., 2012: 20). It seems surprising that so little attention has been given to the experiences of fathers in prison, especially when considering the growing numbers of men being imprisoned.

Research about the experience of fatherhood in prison suggests the prison structure itself has detrimental impacts on male identities; and that as a result of this, maintaining a parent status is difficult (Clarke et al., 2005: 223). This can then have detrimental implications for the contact that fathers have with their children and the strength of the relationships they are able to maintain (Yocum and Nath, 2011: 299). What is increasingly understood is that where possible and appropriate, the benefits of relationship maintenance far outweigh reclaiming or re-establishing family contact after release (Boswell, 2002: 15). For fathers, maintaining a relationship with their child throughout the period of imprisonment keeps up communication; a key factor in supporting them to preserve their position as a father as well as easing the transition from prison back into the community (Naser and La Vigne, 2006: 94). Further to this, it is through communication that fathers are able to feel attached to an identity beyond the structure of the prison and the various constraints this has on individual autonomy.

Given this increased awareness of the implications of imprisonment on the relationships between fathers and their families, as well as the potential impact of maintenance of these relationships on effective reintegration of prisoners back into the community, greater understanding of imprisoned fatherhood is needed. An understanding of the way in which imprisonment shapes family life and family relationships will allow for the development of appropriate policies aimed at supporting family relationships in ways that also support the aims of the criminal justice system (Dyer et al., 2012: 20). A useful way of doing this is by considering fatherhood in prison within the context of “men’s fathering identity and involvement” (Day et al., 2005 cited in Arditti et al., 2005: 269). This allows for both the man’s internal identity and his behaviour, in relation to his parental role, to be explored.

This study examines the impact of prison on fathers' identities and the relationships they have with their children. Given the exploratory nature of this study, a qualitative approach has been taken, drawing on individuals' unique personal experiences.

The study addressed the following research questions:

- From the perspective of the father, how is the impact of imprisonment on the father–child relationship explained?
- What does imprisonment mean for men in terms of their identities as fathers?

To facilitate this discussion the literature review places fatherhood within the current context of the prison. A brief overview and justification for the methodological choices will then be given followed by a discussion of the research findings alongside pre-existing evidence. Finally, a reflection on the appropriateness of the research and its limitations will be given.

The findings show that for the individuals included within this study imprisonment had both positive and negative effects on how they identified as parents and consequently on the relationships they were able to maintain with their children. The primary finding is that the strength and stability of fathers' relationships with their children while imprisoned are intrinsically related to their identity and 'self'. Most significantly the research indicates that more exploration of the detrimental effects of imprisonment on men and their identities as fathers is needed in order to fully understand the experience of fatherhood in the context of imprisonment.

## 2. Literature review

The recent unprecedented growth in prison populations has encouraged scholars to focus attention on prisoners and their families (Dyer et al., 2012: 20; Breen, 2010: 47). The predominant focus within the literature is on the wellbeing of children affected by parental imprisonment and the relationships between prisoners and their partners. Despite this body of research, there is little understanding of how the imprisonment of a father impacts on and shapes wider family relationships (Dyer et al., 2012: 20). As a result of this knowledge gap, there has been little development of programmes aimed at supporting father-child relationships in line with the wider aims of the justice system (Ibid: 2012: 20).

Within the literature there is an awareness of the social cost of imprisonment for prisoners' families and the communities prisoners come from (Clemer, 1958; Nurse, 2002; Comfort 2008). Other research focuses on the structure of contact maintained, how it is maintained and the positive and negative impacts of conducting relationships within the prison structure (Hairston, 1991; Woldoff and Washington, 2008; Bahr et al., 2005). Much of the literature that addresses fatherhood and the family is focused on the process of the prisoner's re-entry into society and family life, the expectations surrounding this, and the positive associations between strong family bonds, successful reintegration and desistance from crime.

This literature review begins by drawing attention to these existing concepts, highlighting the position of imprisoned fathers and family relationships. The literature on fatherhood identity is then considered, drawing on Gresham Sykes' (1958) *Pains of Imprisonment*. Finally, existing evidence is highlighted which suggests that one of the many pains prisoners have to deal with during their imprisonment is an attack on their identity and for many men that means their parental status as fathers.

### **The social cost of prisons**

Two studies have particularly influenced understandings of imprisonment within the context of the family; *Fatherhood Arrested* by Ann Nurse (2002) and *Doing time together – Love and Family in the Shadow of the Prison* by Megan Comfort (2008). Both studies are set in the context of the American criminal justice system but have been used internationally.

Nurse (2002) provides a comprehensive discussion of the barriers that young imprisoned fathers face during and after their imprisonment. The author draws on a variety of research methods, combining in-depth interviews, participant observation and survey data. Nurse's recommendations for reducing the numbers of young imprisoned fathers include policy changes that would address access to employment and limit the length of juvenile sentences in order to encourage the maintenance of relationships, or where reduced sentencing is not suitable facilitate access to parenting classes (Ibid.: 134-135). Additionally Nurse comments that, where appropriate, father-child visits should be encouraged and families should be supported with this through access to transport and the provision of child-friendly settings (Ibid.: 142). Finally, Nurse suggests that fathers should be housed separately so that they can share their experiences, support each other and be given additional phone privileges to assist them in maintaining their relationships with their

children (Ibid.: 144). Giving separate accommodation and additional privileges to imprisoned fathers is likely to be controversial, and Nurse acknowledges this as it raises the question of whether the purpose of prison is punishment or rehabilitation (Ibid: 144). Ultimately Nurse concludes that the social cost of imprisoning young fathers and limiting the relationships they have with their children requires policy intervention to support the provision of services specific to the needs of fathers.

Comfort's 2008 ethnography highlights the human cost of prison from the perspective of women with imprisoned partners, using ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews (2008: 202). Comfort focused on prisoners' female partners and the 'secondary prisonisation' of these women – the constraints that are placed on 'free' individuals in contact with the justice system because of their relationships with those who are imprisoned (Ibid.: 13). This is an expansion of Clemer's (1958) concept of prisonisation, whereby prisoners take on the culture of the prison environment with potentially significant implications for recidivism. Comfort applies this to prisoners' female partners of prisoners, linking in family relationships with the women living 'both ways' with the structure of the prison environment and their own 'free' lives, ultimately impacting on their status as women (Comfort, 2008: 16). Comfort highlights the social cost of prison on the partners of prisoners, showing how the time and resources needed to navigate their relationships with their partners draws them into the constraints of the prison, transforming their lives.

Both of these studies highlight the social cost of imprisonment on individuals and help to identify the exploration of the effects of imprisonment on prisoner relationships as a worthy and relevant topic of interest.

## **Fatherhood**

Nurse comments that one of the most overlooked aspects of prison is its gendered nature (2002: 54). Connell's (1995) work on masculinity suggests there is no definitive understanding of masculinity but it can be understood as a cultural ideal dependent on context and individual characteristics (cited in Nurse, 2002: 54). Social ideals surrounding masculinity are brought into the prison by men, where displays of masculinity become intrinsic for survival within the prison culture (Nurse, 2002: 55), and violence often becomes the most accessible means through which masculinity can be affirmed (Arditti, 2012: 75). At the same time the prison structure is inherently attacking the social norms of masculinity through the deprivation of autonomy, submission to authority and a lack of access to goods (Ugelvik, 2014: 155).

Research shows that the expectations and attitudes that children have of their fathers during and after imprisonment are largely shaped by the attitudes and expectations of their mothers (Nesmith and Ruhland, 2008 cited in., Yocum and Nath, 2011: 288). Often the mother's expectations are unrealistic with regard to the abilities of the father (Yocum and Nath, 2011: 288). Predominantly, mothers expect fathers to contribute financially and have stable employment on release, one of the key characteristics of cultural ideals in relation to masculinity (Yocum and Nath, 2011: 299). Secondly, there is a need for confidence to be built between mothers, often acting as gatekeepers to the children, and imprisoned fathers (Yocum and Nath, 2011: 299). This places certain expectations on fathers to demonstrate a change and the only available way for fathers to do this is through their prison behaviour.

Taking these two components together it is clear that although the prison is structured around models of masculinity brought into the prison by the men, there is a need for fathers to behave in a more conscientious manner, to repair relationships and present their positive intentions as fathers (Ibid: 2011: 299). This literature highlights how the prison structure emphasises particular components of masculinity which conflict with the expectations mothers have of how fathers should behave if relationships are to be maintained.

### **Relationships: Life course and desistance**

The life course perspective has been used to help shift perspective from the motivations for committing crime to why people committing criminal acts choose to desist from crime (Bahr et al., 2005: 244). The life course has been defined as a 'sequence of culturally defined age-graded roles and social transitions that are enacted over time' (Caspi et al., 1990: 15 cited in Sampson and Laub, 1992: 65). They are often referred to as 'trajectories', meaning a pathway through the life span marking 'long-term patterns and sequences of behaviours' such as parenthood and criminal behaviour (Sampson and Laub, 1992: 66). The transitions within these patterns are seen as special life events embedded within the trajectories. Western (2002) has argued that applying the life course perspective to crime means seeing imprisonment as a turning point disrupting these key life transitions (Woldoff and Washington, 2008: 180). Therefore imprisonment disrupts the life trajectory of parenthood, at both the time of imprisonment and further into the life span.

Woldoff and Washington analysed the relationship between fathers' contact with different aspects of the criminal justice system and a weakening father – child bond (Woldoff and Washington, 2008: 180). What they found was that contact with the criminal justice system can act as either a positive or negative turning point in an individual's life transition (Ibid.: 183). Some fathers' engagement with their children is positively influenced by the interruption that prison has on their trajectory. Applying the variables of age, race and ethnicity can also have an effect on fathers' engagement behaviours with studies suggesting that young fathers are less likely to be engaged in the lives of their children (Anderson, 1999 and Sullivan, 1993 cited in. Woldoff and Washington, 2008: 183). However, if contact with the criminal justice system predominantly peaks earlier on in an individual life course and this can then present as a negative turning point in the engagement young men have with their children (Woldoff and Washington, 2008: 184).

The life course perspective can also be used to inform understandings of informal social control (Laub and Sampson 2001 cited in Bahr et al., 2005: 245). In their analysis of the prisoner re-entry process, Bahr et al. apply life course theory to illustrate how individuals leaving prison with strong family ties, such as relationships with their children and the mothers of their children, have more to lose by violating the law (2005: 245). Therefore the life course transition when re-entering the family can help to strengthen the bond between fathers and their children and alter their life trajectory from one routed on crime to a non-criminal trajectory (Ibid.: 245). Research demonstrates that relationships within the family are significant in assisting people who have offended to transition back into the community and desist from crime (Ibid.: 257). Relationships between imprisoned parents and their families can become particularly vulnerable during imprisonment (Hairston, 1991: 88).



Maintaining family ties are important for maintaining the family unit, the well-being of family members and in helping to make the prisoners post-release experience successful (Ibid: 88). Communication between parents and their children become key during a period of imprisonment, allowing fathers to maintain their parental role and keep up their parental responsibilities (Ibid: 91). Research shows that a father's positive involvement with his child will lower his risk of recidivism (Yocum and Nath, 2011: 287).

Much of the literature indicates a positive association between family relationships and prisoner re-entry into the community, however, if a prisoner's expectations of family support are too high and vary from the actual experience on release, this can lead to higher recidivism rates (Naser and La Vigne, 2006: 95).

Swan (1981 cited in. Hairston, 1991: 95) found that where fathers had spent significant amounts of time with their children prior to their imprisonment, those children experienced a more negative impact of their father's imprisonment, according to their mothers.

The families of fathers in contact with the criminal justice system often face a social stigma (Woldoff and Washington, 2008: 181; Codd, 2007: 256). Further to this, a financial burden is often placed on families when an individual is in prison through the potential loss of access to income, as well as when an individual leaves prison and returns to the family' (Day et al., 2005: 184; Smith et al., 2007: 16 -18). Therefore even where fathers are able to maintain relationships, this should be accompanied by appropriate support and access to opportunities in order to achieve basic needs (Breen, 2010: 49). The lack of support given to families negotiating the prison structure as well as the little attention given to the needs of the families supporting fathers during their imprisonment and their re-entry process back into the community places additional strain on families and family relationships (Codd, 2007: 256).

An underlying issue surrounding the punishment of fathers and the maintenance of father – child relationships within the prison structure is the concept of the rights of the child<sup>1</sup>. Boswell (2002: 23) argues that when fathers who offend are punished, there is a need to protect the rights, needs and wishes the children of imprisoned fathers where appropriate. When considering sentencing, those who administer justice should pay greater attention to the needs of the children affected by parental imprisonment (Ibid: 23). By taking into consideration the rights of the child the court would have to consider the social cost and secondary punishment associated with parental imprisonment.

Evidence indicates that taking on roles within the family structure, on release from prison, such as the role of a parent, assists in the development of men's pro-social identities (Hairston, 2002; Sampson and Laub, 1992; Uggen and Behrens, 2004 cited in Naser and La Vigne, 2006: 95). This then allows for a new identity to evolve,

---

<sup>1</sup> The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was sanctioned by the UK in 1991. The convention gives every child protected rights under law, stating in Article Two, that children should not be discriminated against or punished on account of their parents 'status, activities, expressed opinions or beliefs' (UN General Assembly, 1989: 2).

giving the men an opportunity to reengage with their responsibilities as fathers, has been associated with lowering recidivism rates (Waller, 1974 cited in Naser and La Vigne, 2006:95).

An environmental perspective has been adopted in certain studies on fatherhood in the context of prison, which considers the influence of the environment within which fathering is being performed as well as an individual's characteristics (Clarke et al., 2005: 222). From this perspective the role of fathering is as much influenced by the environment as the individual, and consequently highly structured environments, such as prison, influence the identities of fathers based on the norms and values of the institution (Ibid.: 223). This then has a negative impact on the reintegration of fathers within families, as they take with them part of the identity formed within the structure of the prison. Further to this, the removal of fathers from the family structure into the prison can, for some, undermine a responsible and active fathering identity. Contrary to this some fathers see the structure of the prison as a suitable context where they are able to reassess what it means to be a father (Ibid: 231).

### **Identity: The pains of imprisonment**

Gresham Sykes 'pains of imprisonment', found in his text, *The Society of Captives*, describes the deprivations of liberty, goods and services, heterosexual relationships, personal autonomy and security (1958: 64). Sykes believes the pains of imprisonment are best understood by the 'deprivations and frustrations' which add up to a serious psychological assault on the self (Ibid: 64). Ugelvik (2014: 164) argues that the pains of imprisonment are gendered, based on a cultural and symbolic context, with exclusion from family life as a result of imprisonment 'painful in a specifically masculine way' (2014:165). Therefore in the context of imprisoned fathers the pains of imprisonment can add up to an assault on how men view themselves in terms of their status as fathers.

In Koban's study (1983, cited in Hairston, 1991: 95) one of the most traumatic factors identified in women's adjustment to the prison structure was the removal of their mother role. The pains of imprisonment go beyond discomfort by instead personally attacking the individual's psychological well-being (Jewkes, 2005: 45). For male prisoners the prison structure, which is inherently masculine, requires them to put on a presentation of self within what is perceived to be normal masculine behaviours (Ibid: 48). This idea of presenting one's self in a manner that is approved by fellow prisoners is reflective of Goffman's (1959) concept of self and the presentation of self. In order to deal with the pains of imprisonment the men present themselves 'wearing a mask' so as to fulfil the necessary masculine identity required within the culture of the prison (Ibid.: 53). Performing a particular constructed self is also a means of managing the psychological assault of the prison on the individual's true self.

Arditti et al. (2005: 284) argue that if fathers were in some way able to participate in employment whilst imprisoned, this would allow men to provide financial support to their families, facilitating men's involvement with their families and encouraging responsible fathering. Further to this it is suggested that identity work should be done with fathers during their imprisonment to help construct their fatherhood self-identity

(Ibid: 284). This could have significant positive effects on father's identification and ownership of maintaining meaningful contact with their children during and after imprisonment.

Bereswill (2011: 203) argues that the degree to which prisoners are successful in the process of reintegrating into society and desisting from crime is associated with the degree to which imprisonment impacts on the individuals' 'agency and capacities'. Applying this to fatherhood suggests that the deprivation of the capacity to father during imprisonment is likely to have a negative impact on the father's ability to reintegrate back into society. That is why maintenance of father – child relationships is so important for effective reintegration after prison. Fathers who lose contact with their children due to imprisonment are far more likely to experience an attack on their self and their identity making the transition back into society more challenging.

This review of the literature highlights the need for an analysis of fatherhood experiences, taking into consideration both the impact that imprisonment has on father – child relationships as well as the impact of imprisonment on fathers' self-identity. As the literature has highlighted, imprisonment can have serious detrimental effects on the identities of some fathers whilst offering an environment where others are able to readdress their role as a father. Further to this, a parent's imprisonment can indirectly lead to the secondary imprisonment of their children and their partners when they try to negotiate the prison structure from the outside. The social cost of imprisonment therefore involves not only the prisoners but their families too. A continuous theme throughout the literature however is the positive impact that family relationships have on an individual's ability to manage their identity within the prison context, and in easing the transition from prison to home and away from criminal behaviours.

### 3. Methodology

#### Methodological approach

*It might be argued that in reality there are as many prisons as there are prisoners – that each man brings to the custodial institution his own needs and his own background and each man takes away from the prison his own interpretation of life within the walls*  
(Sykes, 1958: 63)

It seems appropriate and necessary to apply Sykes' depiction of the individualistic prisoner experience to this study of prisoner experiences. This study adopted a qualitative, phenomenological case study approach to the collection and analysis of data. The decision to use a case study approach was influenced by the nature of the research and the small sample that this was likely to produce.

Phenomenology is a concept grounded in the idea of understanding lived experiences, and so offered an appropriate framework to explore the experiences of fathers who have spent time in prison (Holloway and Todres, 2003: 350). Phenomenology seeks to understand experiences from individuals' own perspective, and so in the case of fatherhood within the prison structure this methodology allows for the diversity of experiences fathers were likely to have had. In addition, the phenomenological approach gives attention to how individuals conceptualise their own experiences (Ibid: 350). In this study, this facilitated analysis of fathers' experiences without also drawing on the experiences of children as a means to challenge or support the father's perspective.

Case study research has a variety of interpretations and consequently the term is used in a variety of ways and its characteristics are not always distinctive (Ritchie, 2003: 52). As a research method case studies can be used in a variety of contexts to explore and expand understanding of a particular experience (Yin, 2009: 4). For the purpose of this study the term case study is understood as a 'multiplicity of perspectives which are rooted in a specific context' (Ritchie, 2003: 52); in this case the experience of fatherhood within the context of imprisonment, arguing that the process of going into prison and then returning to wider society can be analysed as an organisational context through the different perspectives of the men interviewed.

Case study analysis is advantageous as that it allows for a detailed account of a phenomenon, and so lends itself to qualitative research (Gilbert, 2008: 36). However, it is unable to offer findings that can be generalised and from which comparisons can be made. This is because of dependence on the specificity of the context within which the case is rooted. However, as highlighted by Sykes (1958), the experience of prison is in itself dependant on the individual context, and a case study approach allowed this to be taken into consideration. It is apparent that employing a phenomenological case study analysis offered the most appropriate means to address the research questions.

## **Sampling**

This research project was supported by the charity Positive Prisons Positive Futures. The National Co-ordinator at Positive Prisons Positive Futures acted as a gatekeeper and a means of accessing fathers who had spent time in prison. In addition, sampling from within the charity meant that participants were in some way engaging with resources offered by the charity and were therefore more likely to be in a suitable position to engage with the research.

Purposive sampling was used to gather participants, which allowed participants who fitted specific criteria reflecting the research needs to be identified (Ritchie et al., 2003: 107). The prescribed participant characteristics were, they had dependent children at the time of their imprisonment and that they were still in regular contact with them as fathers. These criteria were reflective of other studies focused on fatherhood and imprisonment (Clarke et al., 2005: 222). Various issues arose as a result of using purposive sampling. Initially it proved to be difficult to find participants matching the criteria who were willing to share their experiences of such a sensitive topic. Ultimately it was decided that despite the small sample size, in-depth interviews were the most effective approach to answering the research questions. A second issue occurred in the final interview when it became apparent that the participant did not fulfil all of the participant criteria. Having already conducted the other interviews it was apparent that the participant was still able to the understanding with their experience.

## **Ethics**

Prior to any direct contact with participants an application for ethical approval was submitted to the College of Social Sciences ethics committee at the University of Glasgow. A discussion of the ethical considerations can be found in Appendix A.

## **Format**

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews which allowed the individualistic nature of the research questions to be explored within an open framework. The interview guide (see Appendix B) was loosely structured around four themes: contact with children, the men's identities as fathers, the relationship they had with their children and, the challenges and support that they encountered. Within each of these sections the fathers were asked to reflect on their experiences and draw upon examples to illustrate them. These themes were chosen as they reoccurred as common ideas within the literature that had been reviewed prior to data collection.

The data was analysed and reoccurring categories were noted and cross-referenced between the three interviews (Mason, 2002: 148). Themes within each interview were then highlighted and grouped into sub-themes. It was apparent within the data analysis that in certain cases, only two of the participants had identified concepts within the theme, this was due to the experiences of the individuals based on the context of their imprisonment and relationship with their child. Theme tables were then produced and quotes were selected and inputted to the tables in preparation for discussion.

## 4. Discussion

The discussion draws on the experiences of three men who were imprisoned within the Scottish Prison Service. Two of the men served short term and one served a long term sentence. The period during which the fathers were in prison varied from several years prior to the interview to months, and the ages at which they were imprisoned were dissimilar. The demographics of the participants varied greatly meaning they brought a multitude of examples and explanations of their personal experiences of fatherhood post – imprisonment to the discussion.

### The frustrations of imprisonment

Prison by its very nature is a world in itself, where individuals are regulated and restricted in their everyday interactions (Coyle, 2005: 111) thus making it difficult for many men to interact with their families on the outside. Ultimately, the prison context makes everyday interactions more challenging and this can affect the ability of some fathers to parent in the way that they would like.

One participant described the frustration he felt when trying to remain active as a father in prison:

*You don't have the power to do anything and that's frustrating, it's annoying and the biggest problem you've got is time, you get time to sit and think about things and all it does is it rattles about your head and what can be a minor, minor point becomes very, very major. (Robert<sup>2</sup>)*

Boswell and Wedge's study *Imprisoned Fathers and their Children* asked men how they felt about being a father in prison. Of 144 adults interviewed, 35 per cent said they felt guilty or ashamed and 8 per cent indicated that they felt frustrated (2002: 39). A key aspect of this frustration was the disconnect between what the imprisoned father believes to be the ideal father, their perceptions of themselves as being good fathers and then the removal of their ability to deliver this ideal parent (Ibid., 2002: 41; Dyer, 2005: 206).

Robert goes on to describe this disconnect between how he wanted to be a good father and his ability to enact this:

*You've got an involvement, but you have no influence or power to change anything that's happening with them, it's like somebody's narrative rolling by you or you're reading a story or you're hearing a story, or watching a programme, you can be upset at events, you can think this is wrong but you can do bugger all about it. (Robert)*

Each of the fathers were able to explain where they had felt a disconnect between what they wanted to do as fathers and their inability to act. For Robert it was the inability of being present at an important appointment with their child:

---

<sup>2</sup> This is a pseudonym. All quotes and references to research participants also use pseudonyms.

*You're sitting there thinking well I can't go to it and I've been to all the meetings from the start... It was something that ate into me because I thought I'm letting the wee man down. (Robert)*

Another of the fathers, Paul, reflected on being unable to do what he saw as being the ideal, and how prison prevented him from being what he saw as the ideal father:

*Look out for them and look after them and well obviously being in prison you canny, obviously her mother was daeing this, the caring part of it. (Paul)*

Paul and Robert were able to relate to a disconnect between how they wanted to parent and then their inability to do this whilst imprisoned. This disconnect is associated with the interruption of identity confirmation, so where the fathers were limited in their ability to perform roles essential to their identity as a father, this then changed the nature of interactions with their children (Dyer, 2005: 207). The fathers then described how these limitations on their ability to parent affected how they felt about themselves as parents and the emotional and psychological impact this had on them. For one of the fathers it was the embarrassment that he felt about being imprisoned. In particular he was embarrassed that he had missed what he described as being "opportunities to create memories" in his child's life:

*Embarrassed, embarrassed that I was in for so long you know what I mean...things like Birthdays and Christmas, New Year, oh aye they sort of things. (Paul)*

Paul identified these dates as being significant times when his awareness of the barriers he faced in trying to be a participatory father was particularly challenging. Consequently, it was at these times when he felt most overwhelmed by the barriers that imprisonment placed on the behaviours he found meaningful to his identity as a father. Burke argues that interruption to the fatherhood identity is particularly distressing because it is an identity to which a father is 'highly committed' (1991: 841). This commitment to the identity means it is more intrinsic to who the fathers are and therefore when this is interrupted the distress is substantial (Dyer, 2005: 212).

Robert described how during imprisonment something that would cause little distress outside the prison context can quickly escalate and become very emotionally and psychologically painful:

*You're locked in a room and things just bounce about your head and off the walls or whatever and minor minor [sic] issues become very major major [sic] issues in your ... imagination. (Robert)*

Robert went on to describe how this escalation of issues quickly becomes attached to his inability to be active in resolving the escalating scenario. This then perpetuated the emotional and psychological distress that he father felt:

*Your rationality and your thought process become very enhanced in the sense that the worst case scenario becomes the most likely – probable, and that is a direct result of being in prison with no ability to do anything about what's happening on the outside. (Robert)*

The interviews with the fathers indicated the degree to which they experienced frustration during their imprisonment, particularly where it was not possible for the fathers to interact with their children in a way that was meaningful to how they perceived themselves. Taking this and what is known from the literature, it was apparent that this disconnect could and did in some instances result in emotional and psychological distress for the fathers. The structure and nature of punishment is to deprive people who have offended of liberties but little consideration is given to how intrinsic certain liberties are to how, in this instance, men identify and relate to their role as a father. Consequently the punishment arguably goes beyond the deprivation of liberties and can be seen as an emotional, challenging and painful aspect of prison.

In this instance policy interventions could be used to address the specific needs of fathers and support them when entering the prison system with access to tools and knowledge to assist them in making positive parenting decisions whilst negotiating the prison structure as a father. Nurse advocated limited sentences or separate housing for imprisoned young fathers (2002: 134–144). However, balance must be sought so that the needs of imprisoned fathers and their families can still be addressed within the criminal justice agenda.

### **Leading by example**

Where the fathers were able to positively link their imprisonment with their role as fathers was in their ability to provide their children with examples of where they had made positive changes to their identity. All the fathers indicated that their ability to show their children that their behaviour had changed while imprisoned was both an important facet of their parent identity and way diminishing the impact of separation:

*Weans don't learn, it doesn't matter what you say tae a wean, they learn through your actions. (Stephen)*

For Paul this was done through education:

*I got into education so I was sort of achieving things every year, so I didn't waste any time in a year, so that was when I sort of got the most out of my time and where I was able tae show her that If I can dae it you can dae it. Cause I couldnae even dae it all at school but went on and done it all and everything eventually. (Paul)*

By engaging with education Paul was then able to send a positive message to both his child and their mother. Yocum and Nath discuss how the mother's degree of confidence in the father's ability to parent was significantly influenced by the father's 'jail actions' (2011: 299). As the primary gatekeepers to their children for the majority of imprisoned fathers, this can significantly impact on the maintenance of the



relationship between the father and child. It is suggested that where fathers take control of their actions in prison and are proactive mothers also increased their degree of confidence (Ibid. 2011: 299).

Secondly, fathers wanting to set a good example to their children and make things right can be a positive motivation to stay out of prison (Yocum and Nath, 2011: 299). Arditti et al. highlight how some fathers discuss changes in their behaviour during imprisonment that leads them to want to 'put in the effort' for 'setting things right' (2005: 277). Such changes in behaviour from imprisoned fathers are a key display of the father's intentions. They go on to argue that some of the discussion surrounding fathers' behavioural changes whilst imprisoned could be considered to be overambitious in terms of how they are likely to be able to perform outside the prison structure (Ibid. 2005: 278). However, by changing his behaviour during his imprisonment Paul was able to connect with his daughter, giving them a shared experience beyond his time in prison:

*When I finished university it was just about the time she started university and got a degree so in our whole family it's only the two of us that have got it.*  
(Paul)

This response is reflected by Woldoff and Washington's analysis of fathers' contact with the criminal justice system and engagement with their children. They found that education had a significant and positive relationship with fatherhood engagement (2008: 197). Where fathers had finished their high school education, or had some form of college education, it increased the degree of engagement they were able to have with their child. Tami-LeMonda et al. have also argued that fathers who had an education were able to maintain a more positive relationship with the child's mother (2004, cited in Woldoff and Washington, 2008: 184).

The data from this study in conjunction with other findings indicates that fathers who demonstrate positive and proactive changes to their behaviour during imprisonment can, in certain cases, build confidence in the child's mother in relation to their parenting. From this the fathers are able to engage with their children and compensate for their engagement with the criminal justice system and begin leading by example.

### **Negotiating contact**

One of the key barriers that prisoners face in maintaining their relationships with individuals on the outside are the practical barriers inherent to the nature of imprisonment and the deprivation of prisoner liberties (Coyle, 2005: 114). Traditionally, maintaining family connections has been seen as of little significance with regards to prison policy in the UK (Ibid: 162). This is despite of the support families can provide in reintegrating prisoners back into society and away from crime following imprisonment. In 2012, The Scottish Government National Parenting Strategy recognised parents in prison as having additional support needs (2012: 16). Through consultation with parents and their families the strategy highlights the importance of relationship maintenance in supporting parents in prison and with their reintegration into their communities (Ibid: 41). As a response to this, the strategy lays out The Scottish Government's commitments to parents in prison and their families.

This suggests there is increasing attention and significance is being given to parents in prison and their families across Scotland.

The prison arrangements for family visits are generally structured around the needs of the prison system, not the families and prisoner's needs (Ibid: 162). Consequently, the prison in itself poses many barriers for fathers in negotiating contact with their children in order to maintain a father – child relationship.

Robert and Paul commented on how the prison setting and visitation process deterred their family from visiting. One father's family faced several challenges in trying to negotiate family visits so that access could be granted. A lack of communication between the prison service and the family contributed to this:

*The very first visiting day the wife never got in because she never had ID.*  
(Robert)

This is an example of the administration of the prison system, focused on security as a means of depriving prisoners of their liberty, inhibiting contact between fathers and their families.

In Boswell and Wedge's study men commented on the unnatural interaction prison visitations produced (2002: 102), arguing that the processes families had to go through were dehumanising and degrading resulting in a tense atmosphere before the visitation had even begun (Boswell & Wedge, 2002: 103). Family members can be made to feel 'guilty by association' when visiting prisoners (Broadhead, 2002 cited in Codd, 2007: 257). However, where prison staff treated the fathers and families with respect and showed support for the family, this was more likely to aid the fathers' self-image and motivate them to nurture and develop their family contact (Boswell & Wedge, 2002: 114).

*[My son] came to visit once and couldn't stick it, didn't like the security, didn't like the attitude of the prison officers, didn't like the environment, he came in and visited once and said I'm nae coming back here.* (Robert)

These findings support the existing literature that where family members feel uncomfortable in the visiting environment they are less likely to maintain face-to-face contact with the imprisoned family member.

Although Robert and Paul were aware of and had experienced visits that were specifically designed to be child friendly, the majority of the interaction they had with their families happened within the standard contexts of prison visits and therefore their experiences relate to this context.

Paul had limited visiting time, partly as a result of the time period during which he was imprisoned. Hairston and Hess, writing not long before this father was imprisoned, comment that most imprisoned fathers did not get visits from their children, and the visits of those who did were infrequent and unpredictable (1989 cited in., Magaletta and Herbst, 2001: 90). This father was allowed one visit a month, and so describes how his friends had to share their visits with his daughter:

*Every visit was the wean because... if you don't get the wean up one month then that means that's two months you go without seeing the wean and I kinda don't like that you know. So, my friends were all told if you come up for a visit your on it with the wean. (Paul)*

Shared visits can present another difficulty, as Nurse found that participant's ability to fully engage with their children was inhibited by the fact that most prisoners had several visitors at a time (2002: 47). Paul also discussed how moving prisons during his sentence, made visits less accessible for his family, and caused distress to family members who had to become familiar with the settings and procedures in place within each establishment. Dyer (2005: 210) also comments on this, arguing that prison transfers can interrupt the father identity and relationships that have developed within the routines of particular settings, meaning the father has to re-establish how he performs his identity within the structure of a new setting.

For many families, having a parent in prison means the household income is significantly lower (Boswell, 2002: 15). The financial cost of travel to and from the prison can be challenging for lower income households, particularly when men are imprisoned further away from home. Paul went on to talk about the barriers that the prison structure itself places on fathers trying to maintain contact with their children:

*Well you're only allowed ... how much you can afford on a prison wage for phone cards, so, usually it was £2 that wis about 50% of our wages you know at that time, ... but then again tobacco was only £1 ..., but it was never really long enough but you always made sure you had extra for the likes of birthdays and Christmas and stuff like that. (Paul)*

This highlights how the nature of the prison was not necessarily supportive or encouraging of relationship maintenance between fathers and their children.

These examples demonstrate some of the challenges families face in trying to maintain relationships with individuals within the prison structure. It raises the question of whether or not the prison can be both a place of punishment and rehabilitation, or whether the prison structure itself limits the accessibility to rehabilitative tools such as the maintenance of father – child relationships.

Another common barrier that fathers face in maintaining relationships with their children is the need for someone to facilitate the contact. The literature surrounding the practice of responsible fathering and involvement all identify the importance of regular and meaningful contact in sustaining father – child relationships (Arditti et al., 2005: 280; Hairston, 1991: 91). However, for imprisoned fathers contact with their children is dependent on having individuals on the outside to facilitate this.

Maintaining contact often came down to the proximity of the prison to families, and whether or not the child's guardian was able to facilitate visits (Magaletta & Herbst, 2001: 90). Lanier's findings (1987) reported that of the 184 men who took part in his study a large number of these fathers were not able to maintain contact with their children for various reasons including lack of transportation, the distance to the prison, lack of access to a telephone or insufficient funds for visiting (cited in., Hairston, 1991: 93). Other studies have highlighted that for some families the

financial costs and distress associated with maintaining relationships through a parent's imprisonment outweigh the overall social benefits of maintaining contact (Hairston, 1991: 97). Therefore for some fathers, despite a desire to maintain a relationship with their children, this is largely out of their control and dependant on the opinions and resources of others.

This is supported by the experiences of the men in this sample. Robert's weekly visits from his partner and older children were facilitated by a friend who would provide transport for the family to and from the prison:

*I had a very good friend who every Sunday would faithfully drive the wife and any of the children up. (Robert)*

The fathers identified how contact with their child was controlled by the child's mother. Much of the literature on imprisonment and co-parenting indicates that where the parents are no longer in a relationship it is less likely that the mother will help to facilitate a relationship between the father and child (Arditti et al., 2005: 282). This was not the experience of Paul who discussed how despite being separated from his child's mother she was supportive of the father-child relationship being maintained throughout the duration of his imprisonment:

*I had good support fae the likes of my ex-wife and you know my daughter's Grannie and stuff like that they made sure that she was up visiting. (Paul)*

For Paul the length of his sentence and age of his child meant that in order for any relationship between him and his daughter to be maintained and developed this had to be facilitated by his former partner. Robert faced restrictions on which of his children he was able to see during his period of imprisonment, as his partner did not want their younger children visiting the prison:

*The wife, she said they're too young to understand, which I disagree wi, by God we had arguments about that. (Robert)*

Robert was serving a short term sentence and in his opinion the extent to which the lack of physical interaction impacted on his relationship with his younger children was not apparent as this was maintained through telephone calls. However, he did question the impact this separation had on him:

*Part of me thinks, I'm glad the wee ones weren't up in that environment and experience, part of me still thinks it was the wrong decision ... it killed me not to see them but at the same time I had to respect what the wife was saying about it. I didn't have much option otherwise. (Robert)*

Roxburgh and Fitch's study on imprisoned parents' well-being, using variables such as contact, age and gender, suggested that frequent child contact, in particular through visits and written communication, was associated with higher well-being among imprisoned parents (2013: 1407). Phone contact was found to be more distressing for imprisoned parents as the quality of interaction was difficult to manage, particularly where strain was present in the relationship (Ibid: 15). Consequently, it is possible to argue that prison programmes that support and

encourage visits and written communication should be supported within the prison. However in order for these programmes to be effective the child's guardian during the parent's imprisonment must be willing, supportive and able to facilitate father – child contact. As well as this great care must be taken to balance the needs and well-being of the father with those of the child.

Other barriers intrinsic in the nature of imprisonment make visiting challenging for family members. The process that visitors must go through to access contact can be frustrating and costly, making contact through visits more challenging. If the prison structure was able to support family members more by making visits more accessible, this could mean less strain is placed on the prisoners' families of prisoners, reducing some of the secondary punishment to which they are exposed.

### **The strain of contact**

As a key concept in successful reintegration, it is important to fully understand how family contact can have both positive and negative implications for imprisoned fathers and their families (Boswell and Wedge, 2002: 108). In this study the men largely saw the visits they had with their children as positive but when asked to recall examples of particular experiences of these visits the men predominantly highlighted times when contact had been distressing for either themselves or their child. Robert commented on how his daughter broke down during the first visit he received in prison:

*One of the daughters came in ... she held it together for most of the visit right up until the last 5 minutes when I says to her how's your mum getting on and she just cracked up, tears and snotters and really, really upset. (Robert)*

This highlights the heightened emotions that are often described as being present during visits between fathers and their children. Also it touches on the idea that both parents and children try to suppress their actual emotions during visits and that the interactions are in some way not authentic. This is then reiterated when Robert described how his daughter believed he was making out as if things were better than they actually were:

*At the first visit the eldest daughter her view on it was I wis just trying tae put a brave face on it and the place was hellish and I wis suffering. (Robert)*

Paul describes this concept of having to put on a 'brave face' or what he describes as a mask in order to get through the visit:

*I found every visit was a challenge cause you, you might be in a right rotten mood in the morning before a visit but when the visit comes you've gotta get yourself out that mood and put on the mask, dae the visit as if everything's great, brand new, but your no really your heads spinning and you just want hame or whatever. (Paul)*

Paul commented that he realised now that his child was probably aware he was putting a mask over his emotions during some visits, but that this was done in a way to protect his child from he was actually coping:

*The ones where you come back from the visit and you're like that, wow, phew, as opposed tae on a good day if you're having a good day and you go intae a visit it's probably a lot more noticeable but you put the mask on anyway.*

(Paul)

Paul went on to discuss how the visits were the main form of contact and so it was important to show a positive persona when meeting with his child because he didn't want to distress her. This is an example of how imprisoned fathers have to manage their behaviour so as not to negatively impact on their child.

Jewkes found in her study of how men adapt to imprisonment through 'doing' masculine behaviours, that the men she studied used a mask as a common strategy for coping with the strains of imprisonment (2005: 53). Jewkes describes the differences between an individual's private 'self' and their public presentation of identity as being either front stage or back stage (Ibid.: 54). Importantly it is the prisoners' front stage, public presentation of identity which encourages them to perform in a proscribed manner so as to appropriately engage within the given social context. In the context of fatherhood, this requires men to engage with their children as fathers but then return to their fellow prisoners and perform a different identity, suited to the social structure of the engagement. These adaptations to the men's identity and presentation of 'self' can be stress inducing as the boundaries between the identities become blurred.

Paul and Robert reported an increased level of distress associated with telephone contact, as they felt helpless and unable to be active in their response to whatever was happening in their children's lives.

*When I'd hear about her problem I'd have to wait for a visit and you know something like that you've really got tae wait until you see her again until you actually speak to her about any problems she might be having you know.*

(Paul)

and;

*It's difficult to say it was a relationship as such it was just conversations on the phone. (Robert)*

Therefore although telephone contact was the primary form of communication that the participants used to keep in touch with their children, it is clear that for these fathers telephone contact alone was not an effective tool in maintaining relationships.

Overall the fathers agreed that maintaining contact with their children during their imprisonment was central to the relationship that they had and took with them when re-entering society. The participants considered the contact they had with their children as what they valued most during their imprisonment. However, the fathers highlighted how contact with their children, an essential component of relationship maintenance, was at times distressing and performed for the perceived benefit of the child.

## Stigma

Within the participants' experiences, one of the most prominent attacks on the individual's self-presentation was the stigma that they faced when reintegrating back into society. Goffman claims that stigma is a 'special kind of relationship between attribute and stereotype' (1962: 4 cited in. Comfort, 2003: 153). Goffman (1962) refers to the need for prisoners to distance themselves from their criminal identities which are viewed negatively by society based on structured stereotypes, and re-associate their identity in a positive or neutral context, such as their parental identity (cited in. Comfort, 2003: 153). Goffman argues that by doing this the person who has offended is able to define themselves by their positive attributes.

The participants identified some of their experiences of coming up against societal stigma. Robert found that he faced stigma based on the stereotypes that exist in society's perceptions of people who offend, as identified by Goffman:

*There's a certain resentment society makes people have about prisoners, its em, even at a very young age they know that there is a stigma attached to it. Doesnae matter what you've done, the fact you're in prison means you're bad.*  
(Robert)

*It's when you come out that you start hitting further barriers and it comes back to this stigma of you were in jail and that's the thing that is the biggest hurdle to overcome.* (Robert)

Robert blamed politicians for encouraging society's perceptions of prisoners and its overall punitive attitude towards punishment, arguing that politicians need to be seen to be hard on crime in order to gain public confidence:

*Aye you're bad, you are uneducated, you are unarticulated, you're a hooligan and you're never going to change. That's the society pressure on it because it's driven by politicians who are looking to win votes.* (Robert)

When applying Goffman's interpretation of stigma, it is apparent that society has been structured to cast out those whose behaviour is seen as socially unacceptable and consequently results in problems for the stigmatised when trying to perform their 'self' (Kepford, 2007: 64). Essentially this can result in the individual having to self-regulate their behaviour within the norms and values of the society to avoid stigmatisation. In order to do this an individual must first internalise the stigma affecting their individual consciousness (Ibid: 65). Society's stigma surrounding people who have offended is arguably a mechanism of social control. Therefore the fact that the fathers recognised and experienced stigma on their reintegration to society indicates that they were consciously aware of their place within the norms and values of society, encouraging them to perform an identity within these norms and values.

Finding employment was one of the key areas of reintegration where fathers identified coming up against barriers because of stigma:

*As soon as people see that you were in prison, they switch off and don't want to know, it's very very difficult to even motivate yourself to apply to stuff 'cause you know what's going to happen. (Robert)*

This stigma is not simply an attack on the individual's identity, it attacks a man's identity based on stereotypical gender roles where the man provides for the family through employment. Work is also seen by many men as a key component of effectively performing their role as a father by being able to financially support the family (Bahr et al., 2005: 261). This identity is inhibited while fathers are in prison, but gaining employment promptly when released can help with a father's reintegration back into the family and their desistance from crime (Nurse, 2001: 134). Therefore the stigma attached to people who have offended can have significant implications on men's identities as fathers and their ability to parent in the stereotypical manner that society expects.

On a positive note Stephen, who had experienced stigma when trying to find work on release, reflected in disbelief on how far he had come and the changes that had been made in his life:

*If I thought I would be sitting here four or five years ago when I still couldn't get work and I was coming up against all the barriers I was facing because of my previous convictions especially in the field I wanted to work in. (Stephen)*

This indicates that where the stigma of society can be overcome the effect this then has on an individual's own perception of themselves and their place within society can be overwhelmingly positive.

### **Addressing the research questions**

The research questions posed at the outset of this study were:

- From the perspective of the father, how is the impact of imprisonment on the father-child relationship explained?
- What does imprisonment mean for men in terms of their identities as fathers?

The findings indicate that the way in which men explain their relationships as fathers is intrinsically related to the impact of imprisonment on their identities as fathers. Therefore, in answering these research questions it is apparent that the nature of the relationship these fathers had with their children during and after imprisonment had significant implications on their identities as fathers.

The fathers highlighted the frustration they felt at being imprisoned, in particular the frustration of not being able to live up to their ideal of their parental status. The fathers noted that they felt disconnected from how they saw themselves as fathers, based on a comparison between what they perceived to be the ideal parent and how they were able to interact as fathers. This represented an interruption in their identity and consequently changed their behaviour and how they interacted with their children within the setting of the prison. Following this it is apparent that central to the father-child relationship is the ability of the father to maintain contact with their children. Imprisonment impedes maintenance of contact as the very nature of prison



is to remove liberties such as family contact. The fathers therefore had to rely on others to facilitate their relationship with their children as well as negotiate the limitations placed on the relationship by the prison structure and the associated strains that came with this. Finally, it is apparent that an influential factor in fathers' identities post-imprisonment is the stigma associated with having been in prison. As the fathers tried to reintegrate, they increasingly had to adapt their behaviour to conform to the norms of the society in order to remove the stigma of being perceived as outside key societal norms and values. For the formerly imprisoned, the stigma itself can prevent individuals from being able to conform to the standards set by society and therefore the stigma of having been in prison can impact on a father's ability to perform key aspects of their ideal father identity.

## 5. Reflection and conclusions

The most significant limitation of this study is the size and nature of the sample. The data presented was generated from a small sample of fathers limiting the breadth of experience represented. The participants sampled were all actively involved in supporting other men currently serving time in prison. Therefore, these men had insight into their experiences and the experiences of others. Had this study been done with individuals who were less integrated in work supporting others to negotiate the prison structure and reintegrate then the experiences reported may have varied significantly to the three presented. However, this was anticipated at the outset of the research, as discussed in the justification of the methodological choices made. This piece of research has been exploratory and therefore no conclusive statements can be made about the findings.

This study looks at the experience from the perspective of gender alone and does not offer any insight into the experiences of men beyond this demographic. There are indications that the experiences of fathers in prison present variations based on ethnicity and age (Woldoff and Washington, 2008; Nurse, 2002). If a more comprehensive study of the experience of fatherhood in prison was to be done these variables would have to be accounted for.

What is apparent are the potential areas for policy interventions directed at fathering from within prison and the significant implications this could have on the experiences of imprisonment for fathers and their families. Most prominent is the concept of peer to peer mentoring within the structure of courses on fatherhood. Within the structure of such programmes fathers new to the criminal justice system could gain access to knowledge, information and support from other fathers. This could potentially have positive implications on fathers' ability to maintain and perform their parent identity within the prison structure. As well as this, other fathers who have lived experience of parenting within the prison structure can offer support and understanding to the challenges that surround relationship maintenance. A final area where policy intervention could significantly benefit the families of imprisoned men is in providing access to free transportation to and from the prison, reducing the financial burden that prison visitations can place on families.

Taking into consideration the current evidence and discussions within the literature, combined with the personal lived experiences of the men interviewed, it appears that imprisonment for these men has had positive and negative effects on their identities as fathers and their relationships with their children.

What this study addresses is the association between imprisonment and fatherhood identity, and the consequential impact of this on the relationships between fathers and their children in the context of the prison and when reintegrating back into society. Overall this study indicates that there is a link between men's identities as fathers during their imprisonment with their engagement and relationship with their child. For the father who was serving a longer sentence, the opportunity to access resources such as education allowed for positive personal development and aided them in their engagement with their child. Where fathers were able to maintain relationships with their children this eased the transition from prison back into

society. However, in the prison context the fathers came up against many barriers which challenged their father – child relationship and put strains on their identities as fathers. What is significant is that despite the strains and pressures placed on their relationships with their children the fathers still maintained contact and in doing so kept their identities as fathers.

## Bibliography

- Arditti, J. A., Smock, S. A. & Parkman, T. S. (2005) "It's Been Hard to Be a Father": A Qualitative Exploration of Incarcerated Fatherhood', *Fathering*, 3(3), pp. 267–288.
- Arditti, J. A. (2012) *Parental Incarceration and the Family*. London: New York University Press.
- Arthur, S. and Nazroo, J. (2003) 'Designing Fieldwork Strategies and Materials' in J. Ritchie, and J. Lewis (eds) *Qualitative Research Practice*. London: Sage.
- Bahr, S. J., Armstrong, A. H., Gibbs, B. G., Harris, P. E. and Fisher, J. K. (2005) 'The Re-entry Process: How Parolees Adjust to Release from Prison', *Fathering*, 3(3), pp. 243–265.
- Bereswill, M. (2011) 'Inside-Out: Transitions from prison to everyday life' in S. Farrall, R. Sparks, S. Maruna, and M. Hough, (eds) *Escape Routes: Contemporary Perspectives on Life after Punishment*. USA: Routledge.
- Boswell, G. (2002) 'Imprisoned Fathers: The Children's View', *The Howard Journal*, 41(1), pp. 14–26.
- Boswell, G. and Wedge, P. (2002) *Imprisoned Fathers and their Children*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Breen, J. (2010) 'Secondary effects of Imprisonment: The New Direction of Prison Research', *Irish probation journal*, 7, pp. 46–64.
- Bulmer, M. (2008) 'The Ethics of Social Research' in N. Gilbert (ed) *Researching Social Life* (third edn.). London: Sage.
- Burke, P. J. (1991) 'Identity Process and Social Stress', *American Sociological Review*, 56 (6), pp. 836–849.
- Clarke, L., O'Brien, M., Day, R. D., Godwin, H., Connolly, J., Hemmings, J. and Leeson, T. V. (2005) 'Fathering Behind Bars in English Prisons: Imprisoned Fathers' Identity and Contact with Their Children', *Fathering*, 3(3), pp. 221–241.
- Clemer, D., (1958) *The Prison Community*, (second edn.). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Codd, H. (2007) 'Prisoners' Families and Resettlement: A Critical Analysis', *The Howard Journal*, 46(3), pp. 255–263.
- Comfort, M. (2008) *Doing Time Together – Love and Family in the Shadow of the Prison*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Coyle, A. (2005) *Understanding Prisons – Key Issues in Policy and Practice*. England: Open University Press.
- Day, R. D., Acock, A. C., Bahr, S. J. and Arditti, J. A. (2005) 'Incarcerated Fathers Returning Home to Children and Families: Introduction to the Special Issue and a Primer on Doing Research with Men in Prison', *Fathering*, 3(3), pp. 183–200.
- Dyer, Wm. J. (2005) 'Prison, Fathers, and Identity: A Theory of How Incarceration Affects Men's Paternal Identity', *Fathering*, 3(3), pp. 201–219.

- Dyer, J. W., Pleck, J. H. and McBride, B. A. (2012) 'Imprisoned Fathers and Their Family Relationships: A 40-Year Review From a Multi-Theory View', *Journal of Family Theory and Review*, 4(1), pp. 20–47.
- Gilbert, N. (2008) 'Research, Theory and Method' in N. Gilbert (ed) *Researching Social Life* (third edn). London: Sage.
- Hairston, C. F. (1991) 'Family Ties During Imprisonment: Important to Whom and For What?', *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 18(1), pp. 87–104.
- Holloway, I. and Todres, L. (2003) 'The Status of Method: Flexibility, Consistency and Coherence', *Qualitative Research*, 3(3), pp. 345–357.
- Jewkes, Y. (2005) 'Men Behind Bars: "Doing" Masculinity as an adaptation to Imprisonment', *Men and Masculinities*, 8 (1), pp. 44–63.
- Keppord, L. (2007) 'The Familial Effects of Incarceration', *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 14: pp. 54–90.
- Magaletta, P. R. and Herbst, D. P. (2001) 'Fathering From Prison: Common Struggles and Successful Solutions', *Psychotherapy*, 38(1), pp. 88–96.
- Mason, J. (2002) *Qualitative Researching*, (second edn.). London: Sage.
- Naser, R. L. and La Vigne, N. G. (2006) 'Family Support in the Prisoner Reentry Process: Expectations and Realities', *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 43(1) pp. 93–106.
- Nurse, A. M. (2002) *Fatherhood Arrested – Parenting from Within the Juvenile Justice System*. USA: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Ritchie, J. (2003) 'Design Issues' in J. Ritchie, and J. Lewis (eds) *Qualitative Research Practice*. London: Sage.
- Ritchie, J., Lewis, J. and Elam, G. (2003) 'Designing and Selecting Samples' in J. Ritchie, and J. Lewis (eds) *Qualitative Research Practice*. London: Sage.
- Roxburgh, S. and Fitch, C. (2014) 'Parental Status, Child Contact, and Well-Being Among Incarcerated Men and Women', *Family Issues*, 35(10), pp. 1394-1412.
- Sampson, R. J. and Laub, J. H. (1992) 'Crime and Deviance in the life-course', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 18, pp. 63–84.
- Smith, R., Grimshaw, R., Romeo, R. and Knapp, M. (2007) *Poverty and disadvantage among prisoners' families*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Sykes, G. (1958) *The Society of Captives*. USA: Princeton University Press.
- The Scottish Government. (2012) *National Parenting Strategy – Making a positive difference to children and young people through parenting*. Edinburgh: The Scottish Government.
- UN General Assembly. (1989) 'Convention on the Rights of the Child', *United Nations Treaty Series*, 1577, pp. 1-15. Available at <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/crc.pdf> [accessed on: 28<sup>th</sup> August 2015].

- Ugelvik, T. (2014) 'Parental pains of imprisonment: Incarcerated fathers, ethnic minority masculinity and resistance narratives', *Punishment and Society*, 16(2), pp. 152–168.
- Woldoff, R. A. and Washington, H. M. (2008) 'Arrested Contact: The Criminal Justice System, Race, and Father Engagement', *The Prison Journal*, 88(2), pp. 179–206.
- Yin, R. K. (2009) *Case Study Research: Design and Method*. London: Sage.
- Yocum, A. and Nath, S. (2011) 'Anticipating Father Reentry: A Qualitative Study of Children's and Mothers' Experiences', *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 50 (5), pp. 286–304.

## **Appendix A – Discussion of ethical considerations**

The key areas of ethical concern for this research project were that participation in the research was voluntary and that participants were aware of the confidentiality and anonymity boundaries and the potential risk of harm to either the participant and/or the researcher.

Where gatekeepers are involved in negotiating access to participants it is important that participants' involvement in the research is not proscribed or constrained (Bulmer, 2008: 152). Due to the nature of the relationship with Positive Prisons Positive Futures, it was important that participant consent was voluntary and in no way influenced by the gatekeeper. Further to this, the anonymity of participants had to be considered. Participants were made aware that complete anonymity could not be assured due to the small sample size, as the gatekeeper would be aware of the individuals who had shown an interest in the study. This ethical concern was emphasised in the participant information sheet, distributed prior to the research beginning, to ensure that participants were informed of the extent to which anonymity could be assured when deciding whether or not to participate. Audio recordings of interviews were transcribed, these were anonymised and pseudonyms were used in order to maintain the anonymity of participants within the data.

Participants were made aware that if they disclosed any information that indicated a child may be at risk of harm, this information would be passed on to the appropriate authorities, in which case the participant's confidentiality and anonymity would not be upheld. This was outlined in the participant information sheet and consent form. The sensitive nature of the research meant there were ethical concerns related to the potential harm that reflection on their personal experiences might have on participants. Clarity in the participant information sheet was therefore essential to ensure participants were aware of what was involved in taking part. In order to try and be prepared should a need arise, resources and information from the charity Families Outside were gathered so that appropriate information could be given about available support.

All three interviews were conducted in the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research at the University of Glasgow. This location offered the privacy needed whilst ensuring that other members of staff would be present in the building during the interview should there be any concerns.

## **Appendix B – Interview Guide**

### **Background/Context**

1. How many children do you have?
  - Are they girls/boys?
  - How old are they?
2. How often are you in contact with your children?
  - Can you give me examples of how you maintain this contact?
  - Would you say that this is similar to the amount of contact you had with your children before you were in prison?
3. What contact did you keep with your children whilst you were in prison?
  - How did you maintain this contact?
  - Can you give me some examples of how you did this?

### **You within the family**

4. What do you think the role of a father is?
  - Can you give me any examples of what you think dads should do?
  - Why do you think a dad should do these things? (society, how they father)
5. Do you think you're a good dad?
  - Can you give me examples of what you do that makes you a good dad.
6. Did you think you were a good dad before you were in prison?
  - For the same reasons are you a good dad now?
  - How have you changed as a father since before you were in prison?
7. How did you feel as a father whilst in prison?
  - Did you still want to be involved with what was happening with your child? Examples of how this was done or how this was not possible.
8. What did you expect to happen with your relationship with your children when leaving prison?
  - Where did these expectations come from?
  - Did you fulfil these expectations? Why/Why not?



## **Being a father**

9. How did prison affect you in your role as a dad?
  - Did the separation from your child change your position within the family? In what way? Examples.
  - Did prison change the things you do with your children compared to before you were in prison?
10. Has your imprisonment had any impact on the relationship that you have with your children?
  - In what way?
  - Can you think of any examples that show how it has changed compared to before you were in prison, whilst you were in prison and now?

## **Challenges and support**

11. What challenges have you faced as a dad coming out of prison?
  - Examples of these challenges?
  - How have you tried to overcome these challenges?
12. Whilst in prison did you receive support to help you maintain the relationship you have with your children?
  - What was this support?
  - Was it useful or do you think that another form of support would have been more useful?
  - Was this support aimed at preparing you in any way for maintaining your relationship with your child after you had left prison?
13. Do you know of any resources or support that is specifically designed to support fathers having left prison?
14. What support would you have found valuable or you think other fathers would find valuable when leaving prison?

That is the end of the interview, is there anything that I haven't covered through the questions that you would like to add?

## **Acknowledgements**

Firstly, I would like to thank Pete at Positive Prisons Positive Futures, for all your kindness and support in making this possible.

I would like to thank the men who took part in this study, for giving up your time to share your experiences with me.

Special thanks must also go to Sarah Roberts and the team at Families Outside, for all the guidance and resources you gave me and for your enthusiasm about what I was trying to do.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr Michele Burman, for easing me through the process, replying to my demanding emails and keeping me on the right track. Your time and effort are greatly appreciated!

## **About the author**

Emma Young completed a BA in Criminology and Sociology at the University of Stirling in 2012. Following this Emma studied for an MRes in Criminology at the University of Glasgow, which she completed in 2013. Emma is now working within the research team at the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland as a research assistant, allowing her to pursue her interest in family relationships.

## **About the Howard League for Penal Reform**

The Howard League for Penal Reform is a national charity working for less crime, safer communities and fewer people in prison. It is the oldest penal reform charity in the world. It was established in 1866 and is named after John Howard, the first prison reformer.

We work with parliament and the media, with criminal justice professionals, students and members of the public, influencing debate and forcing through meaningful change to create safer communities.

We campaign on a wide range of issues including short term prison sentences, real work in prison, community sentences and youth justice.

Our legal team provides free, independent and confidential advice, assistance and representation on a wide range of issues to young people under 21 who are in prisons or secure children's homes and centres.

By becoming a member you will give us a bigger voice and give vital financial support to our work. We cannot achieve real and lasting change without your help.

Please visit [www.howardleague.org](http://www.howardleague.org) and join today.

Chief Executive: Frances Crook

Research Director: Anita Dockley

### **About the John Sunley Prize**

The John Sunley Prize celebrates excellence and the impact of post graduate research into penal issues. Each year thousands of exceptional Masters dissertations are researched and written but few are even lodged in university libraries or shared with the wider penal affairs community. Many will be of publishable standard and would contribute to the pool of knowledge about penal issues. The John Sunley Prize has been established to ensure that the best of these dissertations now get the recognition they deserve.

For more information please visit <http://howardleague.org/research/the-john-sunley-prize/>.

### **Please note**

Views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect Howard League for Penal Reform policy unless explicitly stated.