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the **Howard League** for **Penal Reform**



Voice of a child

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Acknowledgement

This report has been revised by Stephanie Wilks-Wiffen during an internship at the Howard League for Penal Reform.

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Contents

	Introduction	7
1.	Children have rights	9
2.	Mothers in prison	11
3.	Children visiting prison	13
4.	The impact on the children	15
	Who will care for them now?	
	'And then their world fell apart'	
	Stigmatised	
	The costs	
	The innocent punished	
5.	The children's stories	19
	Appendix A: The original research	27
	References	29

Introduction

Forcibly separating children from their primary carer, particularly their mother, can cause severe distress and leave permanent emotional scars (see Bowlby, 1951; Brown, 2001). The Howard League for Penal Reform estimates that more than 17,240 children under 18 years in England and Wales were forcibly separated from their mother in 2010.

In the 1990s, the Howard League first brought the issue of prisoners' children to public attention. The first version of this report (1992) aimed to give these forgotten children both a voice and a profile that would enable decision makers and opinion formers to understand more about these previously faceless children. This was the first time that the children themselves had been asked what they thought about having their mother in prison.

Now nearly twenty years later, the Howard League is revisiting this research. Women's imprisonment rates have remained at around 5 per cent of the overall prison population. A burgeoning number given that the current prison population is over 85,500. Likewise the fact that still more than half the women entering prison do so on remand, and of that number 60 per cent do not receive a custodial sentence or are found not guilty (Bradley, 2009). This means that more children are affected by the imprisonment of their mother than when the original research was published.

A further stimulus was the United Nation's Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Day of General Discussion (DGD) which is focussing on prisoners' children. The Howard League was one of more than 40 international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that supported the Quakers' efforts to ensure that prisoners' children were brought to the attention of the international community.

The children's interviews contained in this report are still as compelling and relevant as they were twenty years ago (see Brown, 2001; Raikes and Lockwood, 2011).

1. Children have rights

In 1989, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child placed children higher up the political and social agenda. It was ratified and finally signed by all UN member governments (with the exception of Somalia and the USA) and came into force in 1992. Its four main principles are:

- Non-discrimination
- Devotion to the best interests of the child
- The right to life, survival and development and
- Respect for the views of the child

Within the Convention, the following articles have particular relevance to prisoners' children:

- Article 2: the State is obliged to protect children against all forms of discrimination or punishment. This means that the State must take 'appropriate measures' to ensure that children do not suffer punishment because of the actions of their parents, for instance if their parents are imprisoned
- Article 3: states that the best interests of the child 'shall be a primary consideration'
- Article 9: relates to children's right to live with their parents, unless it is incompatible with their best interests. It also states that children have the right to maintain contact with their parents if they are separated
- Article 12: states that 'the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child'

In order to ensure children's rights were upheld by governments the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was also established in 1989. This committee of experts once a year (at most) holds a Day of General Discussion (DGD). This day provides an opportunity to discuss and deliberate

'...an issue that has received little attention, either generally or from a child rights standpoint. It can also be an early step in a process that leads to more concrete international protection or which encourages governments to better look after their children...'

Domestically, the Children Act 1989 represented the most significant reform relating to children for many decades by providing a coherent legislative framework. It was the first time that the best interests and wishes of the child were recognised in domestic law. The main principles embodied in the Act are:

- The welfare of the child is paramount
- Children should be brought up and cared for by their parents wherever possible
- Children should be protected by effective intervention if they are in danger
- Children should be kept informed about what happens to them and they should participate when decisions are made about their future

- Parents will continue to have parental responsibility for their children even when they are not living with their children. They should be kept informed about their children and participate in decisions concerning them.

More recently the Children Act 2004 (Every Child Matters) introduced the post of Children's Commissioner which '...has the function of promoting awareness of the views and interests of children in England'. It also established local safeguarding children boards in each children service in England and required of all agencies (including prison governors) a duty to protect and safeguard the welfare of children,.

Nonetheless prisoners' children are not identified as children in need of protection and thus they do not receive specific support from the Children Act or the local safeguarding children boards and simply remain invisible. This is exemplified in a Barnardo's report (Glover, 2009) which found that only 20 of 208 UK local authorities made any reference to prisoners' children in their plans to help disadvantaged children.

Prisoners' children, as the 'invisible victim' of prison sentences, have gradually attracted more attention particularly from the research community but also from NGOs and policy makers.

In 2005 the day of discussion focussed on 'children without parental care'. Flowing from this was a recommendation that guidelines on children without parental care were put in place as it was believed that they

'...could provide a useful tool in ensuring that the best interests of the child are considered in remand and sentencing decisions that could deprive the child of parental care.' (Quaker United Nations Office, 2006)

In concluding points, the CRC argued that the best interests of the child must be taken carefully into consideration by 'competent professionals' when sentencing or remanding a sole caregiver to custody and on any further decisions concerning the residency of the child (Quaker United Nations Office, 2006).

The 2011 UN CRC Day of General Discussion will focus directly on prisoners' children. This has been achieved, after three attempts, through a coalition of more than 40 organisations, lead by the Quakers. The Howard League for Penal Reform was part of this process and will be represented at the United Nations discussion.

2. Mothers in prison

Article 8.1 of the Human Rights Act 1998 stated:

'Everyone has a right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence.'

Women consistently represent around 5% of the prison population held in the 14 women's prisons in England (HM Prison Service, 2011). In July 2011 there were 4,196 women in prison in England and Wales, representing 4.9% of the current prison population. This is an almost threefold increase from the 1,746 female prisoners in custody in December 1992 (Prison Service, 1993) when The Voice of the Child was first published.

This is only part of the story, as each year many people are received into prison custody. Throughout 2010, 13,061 women were received into prison, of whom 6,996 women were on remand (MOJ, 2010 excel spreadsheet 14/6/11). These statistics show that two thirds of women who go to prison do so on remand and more than half do not receive a custodial sentence with a further 20% being acquitted altogether (Corston 2007).

The prison service does not publish or systematically collect figures on prisoner dependants, however surveys of women prisoners have consistently shown that approximately half of them have dependent children under 18 years.

- Ministry of Justice Study (2008) found that 55% of women in prison had children under the age of 18
- Research by the Department of Public Health at Oxford University (Plugge et al, 2006) found 70% of women they interviewed in prison had children
- Hamlyn and Lewis (2000) reported that 66% of women prisoners had dependent children under the age of 18 (Hansard, 2003)
- HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales (Annual Report 2008–09) found that half of all women prisoners surveyed had children under 18, rising to 57% of women over 21

The demographic information about women prisoners has allowed us to estimate that 17,240 children are separated from their mother by imprisonment every year. However, the Howard League still believes this to be an underestimation as women are known to conceal the number of children they are responsible for, for fear of the consequences for their children (Carlen 1983).

Research by the Youth Justice Board and HM Inspectorate of Prisons (Parke 2009) also suggested that 9% of young people in prison aged 15-18 years were parents themselves.

3. Children visiting prisons

Children visiting prisons is often problematic. Prisons are often remote, and particularly with women's prisons they can be a considerable distance from prisoners' home areas. On average, one in five women are placed more than 100 miles from home (Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Task Force, 2009). This creates problems for carers travelling with children to visit their mother and is just one reason why around half of mothers in prison do not receive visits from their children throughout their sentence (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002).

Prisoners only receive infrequent visits, varying according to whether they are on remand or sentenced and their status on the incentive and earned privilege scheme. The timings of these visits further exacerbate the problem. Despite being 'much needed and much appreciated' (HMCIP, 2009) evening and weekend visits remain rare with mainly morning or afternoon slots when most people are either at school or at work. Not only are the timings inconvenient but it was reported that in thirty-six cases (including all six women's prisons inspected) there was criticism of the recurrent severe delays to visits of up to forty-five minutes (ibid).

When visits are managed they are often not long enough to provide meaningful contact between children and mother. Likewise, the physical environment in which the visit is held can also hamper any real contact.

Separation for many is heightened through active choice (Roy and Dyson, 2005). Some mothers opt not to have visits from their children regarding the prison environment as unsuitable for a child (Krisberg and Temin, 2001; Slavin, 2000) as it is unsettling and may lead to a frightening and upsetting experience for the child (Murray, 2003). Prisons are frightening and forbidding places for every visitor, never mind a child. Children have to undergo intrusive searching by adults in uniforms. The architecture and atmosphere are designed to be intimidating. Visitors are kept waiting in shabby corridors with few facilities. When the visit takes place, mum will have to remain seated and is often not permitted to cuddle or hold the child on her knee.

Targeted children's visits

The original fieldwork for this research was undertaken during all day children's visits in Holloway prison. These days were children focused and allowed the women and children the time and space to spend time doing normal, everyday things together like share food, play and talk. These visiting arrangements no longer exist in many prisons due to staff shortages and budgetary constraints.

However, the Chief Inspector of Prisons (Annual Report 2008-2009) reported 40 prisons providing children and family days compared with 27 the previous year. Not all these days were focused on maintaining relationships in the same way in which the visit at Holloway in the 1990s was fashioned as many were

'restricted to enhanced prisoners or to prisoners attending parenting groups [which]...fails to appreciate the importance of family and child contact for all prisoners and families'.

The current economic climate means that budgets are being pared back. The Chief Inspector of Prisons (Annual Report 2008/2009) noted that "...we have learnt with concern that family days in some prisons (including women's prisons) may be among the victims of the budget cuts." The Assisted Prison Visit Scheme which helps pay for low-income families to visit prisoners may be another casualty from the cuts (Assisted Prison Visit Survey Report, 2010).

4. The impact on the children

Who will care for them now?

Five per cent of female prisoners' children remain in the family home once their mother has been imprisoned. This contrasts with 90 per cent of male prisoners' children (Caddle and Crisp, 1997). Nine per cent of children are cared for by their father following their mother's imprisonment (Corston, 2007). An estimated 6,000 children are cared for by other family members, usually the parents/parents-in-law (Hamlyn and Lewis, 2000) or friends, otherwise known as 'kinship carers' (Prison Advice and Care Trust, 2011). Twelve per cent of children go into the care system (Corston, 2007).

Research has highlighted that a large proportion of imprisoned mothers are single parents (Catan 1988; Casale 1989; Carlen 1983, Hansard 2011). Nine per cent of Hamlyn and Lewis' (2000) sample described themselves as married; 15 per cent as cohabiting; and 12 per cent as widowed, divorced or separated; while 63 per cent regarded themselves as single. Large numbers of children could be described as being effectively rendered "parentless" (Woodrow 1992) when their mother is imprisoned.

These children cope with separation from their mother, so often their primary care giver, as well as significant changes to and the collapse of family structures as they were known (Brown et al, 2001). Children are no longer in their normal family and they may also be separated from their siblings.

The lives of those who care for the children are also disrupted. Carers' problems are intensified when they are looking after children whose mothers are on remand. There is the constant problem of not knowing how long the period of care will last. This raises the question of continuity and stability of care for both the carer and the children. These problems can be exacerbated when the carer is older, as poor health and the stamina of the carer could also prove problematic.

"And then their world fell apart"

Prisoners' children especially those whose mother is imprisoned, are often isolated from their support networks (especially those in care) and all notions of stability and security are taken from their lives at time when it could be argued that stability is a key factor in children coping.

As the children's stories illustrate, a child's life can be affected in many ways: the loss of their primary carer; reduced family income; moving home and school; disrupted relationships; stigma; shame; and diminished social support (see Action for Prisoners Families, 2003; Glover, 2009):

- **Children's emotional and mental wellbeing** Almost 30% of children with parents in prison suffer mental health problems in comparison with 10% of the general population (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002).
- **Low self-esteem, guilt and confusion** Some children have been shown to display emotions of anger or defiance (especially against authority figures) and attention-seeking or self-destructive behaviour (Action for Prisoners, 2003).
- **Financial limitations** Brown et al (2001) found that 75% of young people with a parent in prison interviewed experienced fewer treats and activities due to time and money constraints.

1 Mazza, K. (2002) 'And the World Fell Apart: The Children of Incarcerated Fathers', *Families in Society*, vol 83 (5/6), 521-529.

- **Grieving** Children may mourn the separation from their mother in the same way as one would grieve after a death of a loved one (Richards 1992; Boswell and Wedge 2002; King, 2002). Murray and Farrington (2005) claimed it was more damaging to a child to be separated from their parent through imprisonment than separation through divorce or death. It is rare that parental imprisonment generates the same level of emotional support as a parental death (Robertson, 2007). Support for the child is important at this time for a child's emotional stability, and as a result Barnardo's (Glover, 2009) suggested that it was unsurprising that there was such a prevalence of mental health problems among prisoners' children.
- **Engagement in crime or anti-social behaviour** Research has indicated that it is more likely that children with parents in prison will end up offending themselves (see Murray 2003; Dallaire, 2007), or committing anti-social behaviour (SCIE, 2008).

Stigmatised

As women make up a relatively small proportion (5%) of the total prison population it is relatively unusual to have a mother in prison. The potential stigma attached to these children is heightened (Raikes and Lockwood, 2011) which may make them vulnerable to judgmental remarks and derision from peers in particular.

Notwithstanding the stress placed on a child when a father is sent to prison, the fact remains that women still tend to be the primary carers for children. This makes the "prison experience significantly different for women than men" (Corston Report, 2007) and more distressing and disruptive for the child.

*"Many women still define themselves and are defined by others by their role in the family.... To become a prisoner is almost by definition to become a bad mother."
(Baroness Hale – Corston Report)*

The costs

Thirty-four per cent of children affected by the imprisonment of their mother are under five years old (almost 6,000 children last year) and a further 40 per cent were aged between five and ten years (Hamlyn & Lewis 2000). The fact that so many under 5s are affected during this formative period of their life led Baroness Corston (2007) to commend that the effects on children of having their mother imprisoned were '...so often nothing short of catastrophic'.

The New Economics Foundation's 'Unlocking Value' investigation (NEF, 2007) suggested the social costs resulting from adverse effects on children from having their mother imprisoned reach far beyond the criminal justice system. They found that "imprisoning mothers for non-violent offences carries a cost to children and the state of more than £17 million over a ten-year period". They identified an increased probability of these children becoming 'NEET' (Not in Education, Employment or Training). NEF stressed that the misplaced focus by the criminal justice system on short term, quick fix cost controls and low reoffending targets was betraying women and in effect costing more in the longer term.

'It is both feasible and desirable to provide sentencing authorities with cost information on factors such as the cost to family members or local authorities of caring for a female offender's children if she is imprisoned.' (NEF, 2007)

The investigation concluded that community sentences were far more cost effective than custody for non-violent women, arguing that

'For every pound invested in support-focused alternatives to prison, £14 worth of social value is generated to women and their children, victims and society generally over ten years.' (ibid.)

Costs for individuals, communities and the taxpayer can escalate. For example, when a mother is sent to prison she may have lived in rented or insecure accommodation which she is unlikely to retain. It is possible her children have been placed in care. Once she is released securing new accommodation is often difficult. Her children may remain in care. The period of imprisonment, however short, may result in a lengthy or even permanent separation (Townhead, 2006). The result is further distress for the child and greater cost for the tax payer.

The innocent punished

The legal system is based on the concept of an individual being punished for their own individual law breaking activity. It may be argued that in sending a mother to prison this principle is overlooked.

Separation, induced by a mother's imprisonment also punishes the child, causing emotional, social, material and psychological damage. These children, as the children's stories illustrated, are missing out on the qualitative things in life, the love and attention, which most children expect and get from their mothers every day. But they are also missing out on the quantitative things too: reduced access to financial resources and perhaps diminished potential as well.

The Howard League believes the best interests of the child must be recognised and their rights actively considered in decisions that could ultimately lead to the child being separated from their parent. The child's point of view should be represented in the criminal court, by a guardian ad litem or another lawyer, if there is a chance that their primary carer is to be imprisoned. Sentencers should not be allowed to forget the impact that their decisions can have on defendants' children. Why should these children be punished for the misdemeanours of their mothers?

The Howard League believes that the cost of imprisoning mothers is too high, for their children and society as a whole. Every effort should be made to develop and use alternative community sentences, which do not harm and stigmatise these children. Prison should only be used as a last resort.

5. The children's stories

Michelle²

Michelle was 16 years old. She travels from her parent's home in Middlesex to visit her mother in Holloway. Michelle has two sisters: an older sister who is 20 and a younger sister who is seven years old.

Michelle split her time between her own home and her parent's home. This was because she had to take much of the responsibility for the care of her younger sister, as well as caring for her own baby: I have got a little girl of my own, I mean, I honestly don't mind doing it, but I'm in two places at once and trying to lead two lives at once as well – its pretty hard.

Michelle thought that the separation from her mother was particularly hard for her younger sister to come to terms with: ...my little sister, she's ... really, really close to my mum and its her that's finding it really difficult now, as well as me, with my mum being here, 'cos she's never been parted from my mum since she was a baby ... she [her younger sister] finds it very difficult when she goes to school, 'cos my mum used to always take her to school and everybody keeps asking her where her mum is ... and we've got to lie to my little sister 'cos we don't want her knowing where her mum is and why

Michelle's mother is being held in Holloway on remand. She had been separated from her children for about eight weeks when we spoke to Michelle. During this period Michelle feels that her behaviour has changed: I'm a bit more agitated ... because I'm worried about my mum being in here and because me and my mum used to do a lot together I used to be at mum's and my mum used to be with me and now I'm just on my own.

Michelle saw her mum as often as she could. When she saw her: I feel happy to see her but when I've got to leave it's really heart breaking 'cos she starts crying and then, I start crying. I don't want to go because, you know, my mum being here on her own and I'm there on my own We talk about everything ... everything that has been happening ...

Michelle kept the fact that her mum was in prison very much to herself: I've only told one of my friends but she's the closest person to me ... I don't really like telling people what's happening to mum because they might think she's a bad person...

When asked what she is looking forward to most when her mum came out of prison, she simply said: Just being with her.

² All names used are pseudonyms

Mark

Mark was a 14 year old boy of mixed race from south London. He had one sister and another step brother and sister. His mother had been held in prison on remand for four months when we spoke to him; in that time he had moved twice. First he lived with his sister until they were thrown out of that accommodation. Mark was living with foster parents. This was not the first time that Mark has been separated from his mother, in the past he had lived with his grandmother.

Mark was unhappy at school. He still attended the same school as he did before his mother went to prison. He found this difficult and he wanted to change schools:

... I'm always getting picked on ... people cuff me one and I end up having a fight ... then end up being on report ... Quite a few people know [that his mother is in prison] in school ... some of them happened to find out and I told one person and they've obviously told other people ... I don't really mind as long as they don't start saying things about her

Mark did not say much throughout the interview – many of the questions were answered in a few quietly spoken words, often interrupted with tearful sniffs.

When Mark was asked what he missed most about his mum not being with him, he said: Love, getting things and stuff like that, and playing stuff.

Solomon

Solomon was an 11 year old boy of black African Caribbean origin. Solomon had one brother and two sisters, two of them are younger than him. He did not live with his brother and sisters, he lived in Thornton Heath with his mother's boyfriend and his family.

Solomon tended to answer questions very simply, often using one word answers. For example, when asked how he felt when his mum left him, Solomon just said that he was "sad".

Solomon had been separated from his mum for about six months, in this time he had changed schools twice. Solomon thought his behaviour at school had changed since the separation: ... sometimes I'm at school and I can't really concentrate on my work...

Most Sundays (the day of the children's visit) Solomon visited his mum, he was happy to see her but he added that he would prefer to see her at home.

When Solomon was asked what he missed most about his mum being away from him, he said: ... all of it ... I don't really get to see her that much ... well she ain't got much freedom ...

Chloe and Tony

Chloe and Tony visited their mum on the all day visits at Holloway. Chloe was 17 years old and brought her own young daughter to the visits. Tony was 11 years old. They had two older sisters.

The family lived together in south-east London. They lived in their mother's home which was in the process of being repossessed: We're all just trying to keep hold of the house at the moment, trying to keep the house for mum so when she comes out she can still live in her house, I think, like, if anything, we owe her that ... for all that she's done for us all ...

Chloe felt that the separation from their mother had affected her brother Tony the most: I think everyone is finding it really hard at the moment but the hardest is Tony because he's got his big sisters there but I still think he finds it hard that mum's in here, 'cos sometimes we are so busy on our own things, we don't get time to give him enough attention ... he sees us as "big sister" not as mum [who] he can go to and cuddle ...

This was the first time that they could remember being separated from their mum for any period of time longer than that of a summer holiday. The children had pulled together as a family with the older sisters caring for Tony: We've all got a good relationship together, we always go out together, you know, it is not as if one hates the other ... We've just got to do it for mum really. Just so she can be proud of us...

Chloe and Tony's older sisters could not attend the all day visits as they were too old but they came during the week on normal visiting orders. Chloe spoke of this arrangement: I don't think that she [Chloe's sister] minds actually, she just understands that she is too old and she knows she can see her during the week. I think if it was me, it would upset me sometimes not being able to spend all day with my mum ...

Chloe's mother has been away from her for the last nine months, in this time she thinks that her behaviour has changed: I suppose we behave a lot more responsible ... we've all had to grow up quickly ...

Both Chloe and Tony talked excitedly of their plans for when their mother came home: ... she's hoping for parole in November ... we're hoping she'll come out on firework night, we're going to have a really big firework party and all that...

Chloe spoke of what she was looking forward to when her mum returned home, she said: ... being able to sit down and talk to her and tell her my problems, (laughs), boyfriend problems.

While Tony simply said: Its hard to explain ... everything really ... because I can see her everyday, just so I can see her and talk to her ... it's not really the same with my sisters ... I'd rather have my mum there with me ...

Natalie

Natalie was 14 years old. Since her mum had been in prison, she lived in north-west London with her aunt and one of her younger brothers. While in prison, Natalie's mother had had a baby boy who she looked after in Holloway's mother and baby unit. Natalie also had two brothers and five step sisters who lived elsewhere.

This was the first time Natalie has been separated from her mum. They had been apart for several months when we spoke to Natalie. She said: I miss her a lot. I feel angry and frightened Scared[for] my mum, I know I have my Gran, my aunts, I'd be alright ...

Natalie was at home when the police came to take her mum away. This is how she described it: They were horrible, really horrible. She [mum] was pregnant and they banged her against the wall ...

Since that time Natalie's feelings and attitude toward the police changed: When they [the police] say hello to me I stick my fingers up at them ... I know its not all of them ... I know some of them could be helpful ...

This is not the only area of life where she believed her behaviour had changed: I did miss school, but I stopped missing school now. I didn't bunk, I stay at home ... just keep everything done ... because my aunty goes to work she'll never know if I got to school or not.

Natalie saw her mother about three times a month, but she did not like seeing her in prison. Understandably, she did not like her mum being in prison, she said: She can't see things, she's locked up, and she can't go out. She's unhappy even though she's got my little brother to keep her company ...

Natalie is looking forward to her mum being at home: When she is at home it's just good! Just better atmosphere ... her cooking ... when mum's around it's just different. I don't really talk to her but it's just nice when mum's around ...

Marlene

Marlene was seven years old. She and her younger brother lived with foster parents in Essex.

Marlene had never been separated from her mother before. Since her mother was in prison they both had to change schools. Marlene chose to keep her mother's situation to herself not telling any of her friends about her mother.

Marlene and her brother visited their mother regularly. Marlene said she was happy to see her on the Sunday visits. These visits meant she could chat with her mother about what she had been doing and received cuddly toys, which her mother made for her.

The interview with Marlene was difficult, often she answered just by saying "yes" or "no", or not answering at all. She found it hard to talk about how she felt, preferring to talk about her brother and how he felt and his behaviour. The only time Marlene really began to open up and talk was when she talked about the cuddly toys her mother made for them.

Denise

Denise was 20 years old. She lived in Norfolk, she was not able to come and visit her mother in Holloway very often because of her work commitments and the cost of travelling to London. Denise has a younger sister, Debra, who was 16 years old; they did not live together. Debra lived with her father just south of London.

For the last 14 months, while her mother had been in prison, Denise lived with her aunt and family; but she had plans to move out and live on her own. This was not proving to be easy: I think they should help people more when this happens. 'Cos I mean, I'd still be living at home with my parents if this hadn't happened and it's not my fault. I think they should have some sort of scheme for young kids that want to move out of the house and things like that ...

When Denise's mother was taken into custody she remembered: ... it was horrible ... I blamed everybody ... I was blaming my dad. I was always rowing with my dad ... 'cos me and my mum had always been really close, she's, well I always turn to my mum, I've never been able to turn to my dad. Debra's like "daddy's girl" but I'm more for my mum, so when she was gone that way it was like the end of my world, sort of thing, but you have to learn to cope with it, I suppose. You can't sit down and talk to nobody about it because they don't understand, I don't think nobody can understand until they've been in the situation themselves I just wanted her to come home.

Denise believed that her behaviour has changed since her mother's imprisonment, for example, becoming more secretive, bottling up her problems because she did not want to burden her mother. She summed up the change: I've done ten years of growing up in a matter of months ...

Denise was frightened for her mum. She was worried that she would never return home from prison.

Juan

Juan was a 14-year-old boy of Latin American origin who lived in London with his godfather. Juan had only one surviving older sister. Neither he nor his mother had seen his sister since his mother's imprisonment as she lived in America.

Since his mother was arrested, Juan says he felt: Upset, I feel lonely ... This was the first time that Juan had been separated from his mother, however, he did feel that he was getting a lot of support from his friends: They feel bad and they try and help me..

One of Juan's methods of coping had been to work harder at school. He hoped that this would mean that his mother would not worry so much about him. Juan's mother was on remand, and he was very aware that he did not know when she would be home: I don't know when she's going to get out and when she does get out people are going to be talking ... when someone says something about my mum I get mad ... that's what happens sometimes ...

Like so many of the young people we spoke to, Juan was looking forward to the time when his mother was just going to be "there".

Gina

Gina was 18 years old. She had a younger brother and an older sister, but none of the family had any contact with Gina's sister. Gina used to live with her mother in Suffolk, but now she lived in the same town with her fiancé. She was not happy living in her home town: We've had too much trouble and that. I just want to move.

Gina felt a gap in her life since the arrest and imprisonment of her mother: I've always relied on my mum, I don't know why, she's always been there for support and that, and I've needed her a lot in the last few months and it's been really hard – she's all I've got. I don't know who my father is or anything. So, like she's been a mother and father to me.

Gina's mother had always been around for support in the past. Gina had never experienced any long period separation from her mother.

Gina did not feel that she had to tell her friends or other people where her mum was and what had happened: I don't really have to tell many people because living in a small city, like we do, everyone knows anyway. And you have people coming up to you asking, "How long did your mum get?" and it's really embarrassing and that. But I'm not embarrassed of her or anything. She's my mum. She only done what she did to support us ... I find that I haven't got as many friends as I thought I had, nor has my mum.

We asked Gina if she felt her behaviour had changed since her mother had been in prison: I've got into a bad habit of drugs. I'm only coming off them now. All through her imprisonment I've been doing them I tend to be more closed in and that ... I don't communicate as well as I used to – hard hearted, sort of thing ... can't talk to anyone other than my mum, you see. Sometimes I really want to talk to her but ... I don't send my letters I write. But I write to her and although I'm not talking to her, it helps. I just throw them away afterwards.

Gina really misses her mum: I could communicate with her, we'd go out and do things together and have a laugh ...

Gina hates the fact that: She's locked up, my brother's in care and, it might sound selfish, but the fact that she's not with me when I need her. I just want to help her now ... 'cause she needs me now. Gina is looking forward to: Just having her back.

Joshua, Luke, Terri, and Joanne

Joshua, Luke, Terri and Joanne were all interviewed and asked questions about themselves and their feelings about their mother's imprisonment. Luke was the eldest, he was 12 years old. He was deaf and the interview had to be undertaken with the help of a signer. Joanne was nine; Joshua was eight and Terri was four years old.

Three of the children lived in Kent with their father and his new family. Terri lived with her grandmother. Luke only stayed at home at the weekend, he spent weekdays at a school for deaf children. Joshua saw this arrangement as temporary:

when our mum comes home we will get separated from our dad and be with our mum ...

The children had been separated from their mother for just over a year, Joshua remembered how she left: She said she went to her friends ... she just went there to sleep at her friend's and then she called a taxi, and the taxi just come, then the taxi drove her to here

Luke, in particular, stated that he was sad when his mother left them; but he was also angry that she had gone away. He said that they had never been separated from their mother.

Luke said that his friends kept on asking why his mother was always out. He told them that he would wait for her. Joshua had not told his friends where his mum was, if anyone did ask him he said his reply would be: I say "None of your business".

Joshua thought that since his mum had been away, he and Luke fought more because his mother was no longer there to sort out their problems. Luke missed his mother's: kindness and love ...

He was looking forward to a time when he could see his mother all the time, while Joanne and Terri talked about a time when they could all be together again.

Michela

Michela was 16 years old. She lived in London, although she had spent much of her life in the United States. She had one half brother who lived in Israel. Michela's father lived in Europe and she rarely saw him. Michela lived with her mother's current partner.

Michela has been separated from her mother for almost a year and remembered the police coming and taking her mother away. She said she felt sad and lonely.

Michela's mother was on remand and she tried to come and see her mother as often as she could. Michela cherished the chance to spend more time with her mother on the Sunday visits. She hated the fact that her mother was in prison: ...just not having her at home ...

The whole interview was carried out with Michela in tears. As with most of the children we spoke with, her reasons for wanting her mother back were simple:

... everyday things, you know, we used to cook together, I used to help her with dinner and stuff ... having her back, when I come back from school and her helping me get up for school ... I'd just like to have her there ...

Lauren and Charmaine

Lauren was 11 years old and her sister, Charmaine, was six years old. Lauren lived with their father, while Charmaine lived with their grandmother and many of their extended family. They both lived in south London. They always came to visit their mum together.

Lauren remembered feeling sad and lonely when her mother left her. She said that she also missed her mother's "cuddles".

Charmaine was asked how she felt when she came to visit her mother on the extended day visits. Her answer was that she felt happy and that: I want to sleep with mummy ... and I want to stay with her ... I want her to come home and I miss her a lot ... I want her to come home...

Lauren, when asked what she was looking forward to when her mum came home replied: Mum's dinners ... just being with her ... I just want her to come home.

Appendix A: The original research

In January 1990, the Howard League for Penal Reform established the 'Mothers Behind Bars' group comprising of prison governors and staff, trade union representatives, independent monitoring boards (then Boards of Visitors), and voluntary sector organisations including Save the Children Fund and the Mothers' Union, as well as drawing in other experts in child care and law. During 1990 the Howard League raised money and facilitated the development of a child-friendly visiting scheme in Holloway prison and Whitemoor men's prison. This was inspired by a similar scheme seen in Bedford Hills prison in New York State.

The all-day children's visit enabled children to spend a whole day with their mother in a pleasant and child centred environment. The scheme provided the children with an environment not dissimilar to that of a community centre where mothers and children joined together in activities ranging from swimming to painting, and reading to roller-skating. The scheme gave mothers the chance to take responsibility for their own children and went some way to giving women back some self-esteem.

A generous grant from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation enabled an investigation into children's feelings and perceptions of having their mother in prison and the final report: *The Voice of a Child*.

Early in 1992 permission was granted for the Howard League to talk to the children whose mothers were in Holloway prison in London. The semi structured interviews, with a team of trained interviewers from Save the Children Fund, were undertaken in the course of the children's visits. Save the Children Fund staff and volunteers staffed the visits, so the interviewers were familiar with the environment and the children recognised them.

There were three main groups of questions: about separation from their mothers; their feelings when they see their mother and information about them and their living circumstances. All interviews were recorded. We allowed younger children to be interviewed with their older siblings although most were on a one-to-one basis.

We did not try and match the sample. The children interviewed mainly lived in Southern England which is the main catchment area for Holloway prison. They came from a variety of backgrounds including children of Latin American, African and Caribbean backgrounds. The children were aged between 4 and 20 years.

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ISBN 978-1-905994-40-3



9 781905 994403 >

ISBN 978-1-905994-40-3

Price £10.00
2011