

Evidence for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Women in the Penal System Inquiry into Women’s Health and Well-being in Prisons

Submitted by

Dr Lucy Baldwin. Senior Lecturer in Criminology FRSA. FHEA.

De Montfort University

lbaldwin@dmu.ac.uk

April 30th, 2021

Content.
1 Introduction
1.1- 1.2 Sources of research evidence
2. – Research Findings of Significance to Women’s Health and Well-being in Prison
2.1. Unnecessary Imprisonment
2.2 Entering the prison space and early days
2.3 Mothering and Grandmothering ‘inside’ and from a distance
2.4 Regimes, rules and Relationships.
3. Conclusions and Recommendations.
4. Appendix – Case Studies- Mary and Cassie

1.Introduction and Summary of Content

1.1 This evidence submission is centred around the belief that, when working with women in the criminal justice system, that there is a need to recognise, understand and importantly ‘factor in’ the additional layer that motherhood brings to existing complexities of criminalised women and importantly, that failing to do so impacts negatively on the health and well-being of mothers in prison. Failing to recognise the significance of a mothering role and identity is not only negligent but is harmful, and indeed potentially life threatening to imprisoned mothers (as this evidence will demonstrate).

Motherhood has a centrality to it that is *never* irrelevant to engagement, wellbeing or outcomes- whatever a mother’s circumstances, whether she has her children in her care or not at the point of her imprisonment or is a pregnant or new mother- her mother role and maternal identity need to be acknowledged, accounted for and factored into to her care and rehabilitation.

Failure to recognise this do fails the mothers and the children – are ergo by definition also fails future generations and society more generally.¹

¹ For additional evidence in relation to working with and making positive change across the whole of the CJS please see the edited collection, very particularly and at least the introduction and closing chapter, ‘*Mothering Justice; Working with Mothers in Criminal and Social Justice Settings*’ (Baldwin, L. 2015 Waterside Press)¹.

The evidence for this submission is drawn from my Doctoral and additional research, which includes interviews directly with women in and after prison, primarily mothers and grandmothers, but also with carers of children of imprisoned parents and staff working with mothers throughout the criminal justice system (CJS). I have published several books, chapters and papers as a result of the research, including a research report specifically centred around mothers and short sentences '[Short but not Sweet](#)' (SBNS) . For ease I will attach some relevant publications as appendices to this evidence, but some papers are hosted on the NICCO website². All have relevance in their findings to a central aim of this review in relation to imprisoned women and their health and wellbeing in prison.

1.2 As my research has involved speaking directly with those affected I include the women's voices and narratives in this evidence, relating to how the mothers feel their health and wellbeing is affected by prison – specifically related to their motherhood and maternal role. This evidence also includes feedback from a pilot of a mother's programme that I designed in partnership with PACT (Prison Advice and Care Trust), informed by the findings of my research. The program 'Mothers Inside Out' (MIO), was piloted at HMP Downview, supported and co facilitated by PACT (see Appendix). The mothers were very positive about the programme, with it having a key effect in several ways, not least preparation for release, improved communication and relationships with their children, but also very importantly, improved mental health, emotional regulation and reduced self-harm. I have included in this submission several mother's own feedback from the course. The course was due to roll out to several prisons pre-covid and we are hoping this will resume asap.

Although there was so much more to say I have focussed this evidence and my recommendations into three key areas where mothers health and wellbeing is affected; Entering the prison space and early days, Mothering and Grandmothering 'inside' and from a distance, and Regimes, rules and Relationships.

Finally, this submission will conclude with recommendations drawn directly from all the authors research as referred to in this submission.

2. Research Findings of Significance in relation to Health and Wellbeing of Mothers in Prison

2.1 Women, and particularly mothers are being sentenced to custody, often unnessecearily and most often for minor offences- resulting in short sentences (see also previous evidence of Dr Shona Minson and Rona Epstein). My research has revealed the very many multi

Please do let me know if you would like me to send copies – the Introductory chapter in the book sets out why we should be factoring in motherhood and maternal emotion in relation to social and criminal justice and the closing chapter outlines some key recommendations that have not dated or become less important since 2015. The various chapters in the book outline key areas of work with mothers and include Court, prison, policing, Addictions, Community Supervision, Mental health, Social work and prison mother and baby Units.

² Further research publications of the author are hosted by NICCO and can be accessed here - <https://www.nicco.org.uk/directory-of-resources/lucy-baldwin-works-on-maternal-imprisonment>

agency missed opportunities to support and engage with mothers more fully in the community. If such opportunities had not been missed then many Mothers in this research might have avoided criminalisation and imprisonment at all (please see appendix 'Marys Story' and 'Cassie's story' as examples). The research also echoes previous research (Minson 2020, Baldwin and Epstein 2017, Epstein 2012), which found that Sentencers/Magistrates, (and because of the nature of women's 'offending' it is mainly Magistrates), are failing to consistently adhere to sentencing guidelines regarding pregnant and new mothers and mothers with dependant children (for example the [Bangkok Rules](#)). Thus meaning that the health and wellbeing of criminalised mothers (and incidentally their children) is being affected even before women arrive at the prison gates

2.2 Entering the prison space and early days

My research found that all of the mothers felt both they and their children, were negatively affected by their imprisonment, despite the often 'shortness' of their sentence. Many of the mothers had pre-existing mental health issues, with several taking prescribed medication, including antidepressants and/or HRT- many mother's experienced delays in accessing medication – most for over a week, two mothers, over 2 weeks. Mothers described the impact of this: *"I felt the worst I've ever felt", "I self-harmed for the first time ever", I felt anxious all of the time"*, and several mothers described feeling *'suicidal'* in this period.

The mothers in the research described how their health and wellbeing was negatively impacted due to failures in the 'system' to accommodate and recognise their maternal needs and emotions. Many mothers describe this crucial period as 'risky' or 'dangerous' in terms of their mental wellbeing. The prison environment brought specific challenges and experiences to the Mothers, discrete from the separation from their children. This included the actual prison space itself; whether the prison was open or closed³, how it was organised, the regime, and Mothers relationships with prison staff and each other. These factors either mitigated or aggravated the pains associated with Mothers' maternal experience - which was disrupted, altered, or destroyed by prison (Baldwin 2021). The Mothers' feelings of powerlessness, shame, disorientation and wellbeing during their early days in custody were compounded by and interrelated to their mother status:

"Going to prison as a mother is I think the worst thing... I genuinely can't think of anything worse as a mother to do to your children... I felt like I was watching it as if it was someone else. I was numb with shock but at the same time all I could think about was my children... I felt physically sick, unwell and just incredibly weakened...my resilience was gone." (Jaspreet)

Jaspreet goes on to say that she felt 'suicidal' during her early imprisonment, something described by many mothers. Indeed Kady states that if not for one 'kind' officer who helped her during those first few hours she feels sure she would have taken her life. Mothers experienced delays in securing their first 'reception' phone call and even longer delays in

³ In the female estate, prisons are defined only as 'open' or 'closed' as women are not categorised in the same way as male prisoners. Ten of the twelve women's prisons in the UK are closed-prisons, despite more than 80% of the women being in prison for non-violent offences. See also <file:///C:/Users/lbald/Downloads/SN05646.pdf>

securing visits. There were delays in PIN numbers being added to their personal lists – which often meant vital contact with children and carers was significantly delayed, which again seriously impacted mothers ‘wellbeing, and during what one mother described as ‘mentally my most vulnerable period ever, I was genuinely suicidal’ (Nicola). Annie, who had not expected to be sentenced to immediate imprisonment (this was not an unusual occurrence in my research) and had simply dropped her daughter to school that morning, expected to be able to make calls to family to find out where her daughter was, who had picked her up from school. She was not given her reception phone call⁴, which led to untold stress:

“I was supposed to get a reception phone call, but I didn’t get it because there was so many of us on the prison transport that day. I was literally going crazy crazy crazy. It was driving me mad not even knowing she was safe. It was hours and hours before I finally got an officer to check for me that she was safe. I genuinely thought I would have a heart attack from the stress.” (Annie)

Annie’s experience was not unusual, echoing various previous findings by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP). Many Mothers stated they had experienced delays in accessing their reception phone call. Mothers described how the delayed contact, especially with their children, impacted negatively on them, making their first days in custody - when they were at their most vulnerable. Mothers spoke of not being able to ‘settle’ (Sophie), ‘think straight’ (Cynthia), ‘concentrate on anything’ (Karen), ‘sleep’ (Annie), or ‘eat’ (Sophie), until they had seen or at least been in contact with their children. Missing their children permeated every aspect of their prison life and to many it was all-consuming, especially in the early days and weeks and the negative impact on the mothers wellbeing was compounded by the lack of support they felt they received from the prison and prison staff.

Visits as well as phone calls were often delayed, this had a significant impact on the Mothers’ wellbeing (and likely their children’s wellbeing). Tia was sentenced just before Christmas and had not yet seen her children after three weeks in custody. She was told she was being moved to another prison the day before her children were due to visit. She was already more than two hours away from home, the prison she moved to was a further 150 miles away (almost three hours) from her home:

“They shipped me out to [name of prison the day before the visit] Just because the prison was full they said - simple as that... I said I can’t go, I can’t go on the ship out I haven’t seen my kids yet... they are coming tomorrow, and they just said ‘the visit will be cancelled’. There is no emotion, no sorry... the answer was just ‘tough you are going, you are booked on the van’. I was devastated, I couldn’t believe it.” (Tia)

Tia goes on to say that staff forgot to cancel the visit and her children (aged four and twelve) arrived at the prison expecting to see their mother, whom they had last seen when she was arrested at the school gates three weeks before. Tia stated ‘...to say they were devastated is an understatement, apparently Theo [the 4-year-old] could be heard crying right through the

⁴ See guidance regarding reception phone calls: [https://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/offenders/psipso/psi-2015/psi-07-2015-pi-06-2015-early-days-see also custody.pdf](https://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/offenders/psipso/psi-2015/psi-07-2015-pi-06-2015-early-days-see%20also%20custody.pdf)
<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Prisoner%20Information%20Pages/04%20Keeping%20in%20contact%20with%20family%20and%20friends.pdf>

hall, I was told'. Tia's move meant that the children and their caregiver would have to stay overnight in a nearby hotel to facilitate a visit, adding further financial burden to a family already struggling, which again increased the stress and strain on Tia- which she found very difficult to cope with – but significantly she, like other mothers was reluctant to ask for 'antidepressants' to help her cope for fear of being judged a poor copier and triggering social service referrals that would 'follow' her outside post release. The institutional thoughtlessness related to motherhood had a negative impact on mothers wellbeing.

About a third of the Mothers disclosed they had self-harmed at some point in their lives. Mothers spoke of self-harming *directly* related to their mothering pain, especially during the early days and weeks, often the most vulnerable period for Mothers. Sam described self-harm *'as a way of coping [with missing her son]...letting out the pain'*. (Sam). Nicola had previously lost two children to the care system and her third child was taken on her reception into custody, *'yeah I thought about ending it, the pain was too much, another child, gone... I felt dead.'* (Nicola). Clearly, Mothers who self-harmed, missed their children and the associated guilt and shame of being a mother in prison was a trigger for both suicidal ideas and self-harming actions. Rita spoke of being in the cell next to a girl who attempted (unsuccessfully) to take her life after being informed that her child would be adopted. Rita spent the *'next few days trying to talk her out of killing herself'*.

There was little doubt that mothers wellbeing was negatively affected by the lack of understanding and care concerning their motherhood and maternal role. For women often their most pressing concern is their children, and this is no less true for criminalised women- yet mothers felt they were expected to 'leave that identity at the prison gate' and were 'no more than a prisoner', meaning their maternal emotions and circumstances rendered the mothers vulnerable. Failing to adequately support mothers in prison, especially in the early days and weeks is not only morally wrong and negligent-it is potentially fatal.

2.3 Mothering and Grandmothering 'inside' and from a distance

My research revealed how Mothers' efforts to maintain a healthy maternal-identity and role were continually frustrated during incarceration and that this had a negative impact on Mothers wellbeing, especially their mental wellbeing. All of the Mothers in the study articulated that there was a distinction between 'being' a mother and actually *'doing the job'* (Beth) of mothering. The 'actions of mothering' or, as O'Reilly (2006) calls it, 'motherwork', was hugely important to the Mothers and grandmothers. The 'stripping away' (Goffman, 1961) of their maternal role and their maternal identity was painful:

*"There's a massive difference in actually **being** a mother and actually **doing** it, anyone can get pregnant, anyone can have a kid, but that's not the doing bit is it? Being there for them, being*

*reliable, being on their side and putting them first, loving them more than anything or anyone, that's being a mother **and** doing the job."* (Beth)

Enos (2001) suggests that 'roles' in life reaffirms who we are by what we do; thus, as a fire fighter fights fires, and a nurse nurses, she argues that mothers need to mother in order to 'feel like' mothers and when mothers are not able to do this they (and their children suffer).

The mothers were in the main consumed by guilt and this impacted negatively on their wellbeing as mother prisoners, but in which they were largely unsupported. My research demonstrated that guilt was a life threatening emotion to the mothers, and several stated they only 'survived' because of care or compassion shown to them sometimes by individual staff members- but most often from other mothers (revisited shortly). Hope was the best antidote to guilt for the mothers and their 'hope' often centred around contact, visits and phone calls and obviously dreams of release. However, mothers feelings around visits were often mixed, and contact was often of poor quality and infrequent because of prison regimes, or the structures and set up of the prison. Because of this mothers sometimes made the difficult decision to not allow their children to visit at all – which obviously often impacted negatively on mothers wellbeing (and their children's).

"I didn't want him to visit because I thought... I didn't want to upset him because I know he wouldn't understand what was going on. I would be the one breaking down when he had to go, and I didn't want him to see thatbecause he wouldn't understand why mummy couldn't come out...I didn't want that for me or for him. It would be just too painful." (Shanice)

Shanice described how she witnessed mothers coming back from visits and self-harming, or just breaking down and not coping at all. Like Rita, Taranpreet spoke of a mother in the next cell to her who had tried to take her own life after a visit with her six-month-old baby. The feeling that visits were a 'mixed blessing and 'bittersweet' was particularly the case in closed prisons – discussed in more detail later. Mothers described complex and competing emotions before a visit, such as anxiety, foreboding, worry, excitement, guilt, shame, sadness and happiness - with a similar range of emotions occupying their thoughts post-visit. The emotional rollercoaster of prison motherhood was hard for mothers and again impacted on their mental wellbeing and mothering emotions significantly. On the one hand, the Mothers were desperate to see their children, wanting to '*hug them and tell them I love them*' (Tanisha), but on the other hand, Mothers wanted to '*protect them from the shame of a prison*' (Mavis), or to protect and control their own and their children's emotions:

"I was scared of the emotional fall out of visits, mine and hers... I just don't think I would have coped if I seen her in person, it was easier to block off my feelings into boxes... by not seeing her I mean. I wouldn't have coped I know I wouldn't, and I don't think she would have either." (Margot)

Several Mothers experienced one or all of their children going into either temporary or permanent care of the LA, and all six described this background/invisible mothering, even though they may not - or were not expecting to - regain custody of their children. The Mothers all described their mother identity as significant to them and as something that if not supported or understood impacted their mental being negatively.

"I thought about my kids every day, in that sense I was no different to the other mothers... but no one cared, that part of me was gone, over done with as far as the prison was concerned ... it was like I was never a mum to them and that hurt , it really hurt and I had no idea what to do with those feelings." (Nicola)

Beth, who had been still breastfeeding her three-month old baby when she was sentenced, described the 'agony' of having full and leaking breasts, 'but no baby'. She stated that she:

"...thought of my daughter every single minute of every single day, it was awful. I didn't want to be here most of the time, I felt like nothing... I missed her so much." (Beth)

Beth went on to say that being so depressed and upset about her daughter made it impossible for her to engage with rehabilitation activities and sentence planning – which had an impact not only on her mental health and wellbeing but her long term rehabilitation and ability to cope (tragically Beth later took her own life post release – directly as a result of not being support in an after prison as a mother). The expense of phone calls, the lack of access to telephones and the challenges of maintaining contact via abusive or controlling caregivers all added significantly to the challenges the mothers faced and impacted negatively on their mothers wellbeing and sometimes their physical health (through increased stress levels, self-harm, blood pressure etc).

For some Mothers phone calls were an opportunity to engage in active mothering, but from a distance. This was essential to the mother's own sense of self as a mother and to her ability to retain an affirming or positive maternal identity. Mothers in the study endured several home crises that they tried to guide and assist their children through, over the telephone and sometimes in visits. These included school bullying, teenage pregnancies, relationship breakdowns, miscarriage scares, exams, serious illness and bereavement. These were, of course, stressful times for the Mothers and grandmothers, yet being involved in decision-making and solutions as they might have been had they been at home was an important factor in their retaining a positive maternal-identity and role. As previously stated by Shanice, however, it was often the 'little things' that some Mothers missed most, and they would phone home as often as they could, sometimes daily, to be able to engage in 'normal' everyday conversations and activities:

"We would actually go through the shopping list together on the phone and I would help her decide what meals to cook for the little ones and her dad... then I'd go through how to do it,

step by step. I think I enjoyed those phone calls the most as I was just a mum then... just a mum on the other end of the phone.” (Rita, 35)

Mothers described how they would continue their active mothering via telephone and letters, going through homework with their children, phoning to see how their school day had gone or continuing to parent them by disciplining or just listening to them- all of which had a positive impact on their mental wellbeing:

“Yes all of us used to say that... it was so important to still be mum, even to nag them. I would be telling them off down the phone, and they would tell me stuff they wouldn’t tell their dad.” (Rita)

As demonstrated in this research, the Mothers’ efforts, and whether they were allowed to engage in active mothering from behind bars, were varied and challenged; most if not all were constantly trying to renegotiate their mothering role and identity in the carceral setting and the challenges this presented which impacted their wellbeing. However, not all of the challenges originated from within the prison. For some of the Mothers, difficulties with family dynamics and caregivers impeded or complicated their ability to continue actively to mother their children and grandchildren, which further contributed to their spoiling maternal identity and feelings of powerlessness. Mothers were reliant on caregivers to facilitate contact and their relationships with caregivers was therefore a significant factor in the shaping and maintenance of the Mothers’ relationship with their children. Some mothers experienced tense relationships with caregivers who had often taken on this role and were struggling financially, emotionally and practically with the additional responsibility of imprisoned mothers children. Imprisoned mothers knew this and it served often to add to their guilt and stress. Mothers experienced (disclosed) violent/controlling ex-partners who engaged in this type of behaviour, contributing to the women’s sense of powerlessness as mothers. The abuse and control they had previously endured was simply continued through their children. Taranpreet stated, *‘...he knew he could hurt me most through the kids’*. These acts were deliberate and represented direct attacks on the Mothers arguably *because* the abusers believed this would be the *most* painful way to ‘attack’ the Mothers. Melanie illustrates:

“I don’t have much contact with my daughter, my ex has her whilst I’m in here and he don’t want me to have contact with her, it’s just an excuse to punish me and control me like he always does. He don’t care that it punishes her too. God knows what he’s saying to her about me.” (Melanie)

Similarly, Annie described how her violent and controlling ex (the father of her child), controlled not only her access to her daughter, but also what she was ‘allowed’ to tell her on the phone:

“I didn’t speak to my daughter for the first five weeks I was in, I cannot explain the emptiness of that time. We have a good bond my daughter and me and we had been together or spoken every day before that [they had a 50/50 shared custody arrangement]. But he wouldn’t let me speak to her, I was literally in pieces literally you know, emotionally and physically. I can’t describe the pain because she is and always has been the reason I get out of bed. But he told me what I had to agree to say to her before he would let me speak to her. I had to say I’d let everyone down. I had to say I’d done wrong and I was ashamed and that I was a bad person and was now where bad people went. He made me promise to say all of that when she rang and if I didn’t he said he would cut off the call and not let her ring me back. He only allowed five-minute phone calls, that’s it five minutes once a week... then he would hang up” (Annie)

Obviously, examples such as these (and there were many more) impacted the mothers wellbeing significantly – but went largely undetected, unsupported and unrecognised by the prison and prison staff – revealing vital missed opportunities to ensure the best state of health and wellbeing of imprisoned mothers. Knowledge of mothers and children’s caregiving circumstance is an important part of effectively supporting imprisoned mothers – and reveals the relevance and importance of also supporting families who do take on this care giving role.

Pregnant Mothers felt their physical health as well as their mental wellbeing suffered whilst incarcerated (see also Dr Abbotts’ submission). All the mothers who were pregnant in my research described being *‘terrified’* of giving birth in their cells, more common that we would care to think (see Dr Abbotts submission), and the stress of being pregnant in prison cannot be overstated. Two mothers in my SBNS research miscarried in prison, one in an ambulance in handcuffs after bleeding in her cell alone overnight. Both mothers felt the *‘stress’* of being imprisoned had *at least* contributed to them miscarrying. New mothers, both those who were separated from their babies and those who were lucky enough to be allocated an MBU space, described negative consequences of their imprisonment on their health and wellbeing- especially their mental health. Mothers on the MBU described feeling stressed at being *‘watched 24/7’ (Kady)*, and not always being provided with the support they felt they needed. Other mothers felt that the *‘living with the threat of having your baby taken off you at any point is like ‘walking on eggshells’ (Tarian)*. Mothers found this very stressful. Some mothers felt that *‘some’ staff ‘held over’* them the threat of separation as an active threat and a means of maintaining compliance, which obviously impacted the wellbeing of mothers. Other mothers described how they wished they would have been able to access their MBU space much sooner as they found living in the main prison stressful and worrying – which sometimes impacted on their ability to be able to relax into their pregnancy and prepare for the birth or bond properly with their baby, which can have lifelong implications for both mother and child *“I was so concerned with keeping my belly safe in there I didn’t really think about it as a baby or even me as a mam... so when the baby was born I felt quite disconnected. I didn’t feel like he was even mine” (Tanisha),.*

Additional concerns in pregnant and new Mothers in my research echoed Dr Abbotts evidence in her submission – delayed MBU boards, delayed decisions after sitting the board, lack of consideration of pregnancy needs- emotional and physical, feelings of being negatively judged and a lack of trust in the mothers by staff and poor support following separation either at birth or the 18 month mark. Mothers described feeling stigmatised and ashamed of attending antenatal appointments in cuffs and feeling the lack of control over their pregnancies added to their stress (please see SBNS report also), all of which bore relevance to the mental health and wellbeing of the mothers (equally as did positive experiences).

2.4 Regimes, rules and Relationships

There was an inherent power behind the staff/prisoner relations. All of the Mothers described how treatment from prison staff (particularly prison officers) towards them *as mothers* was important and relevant to their wellbeing. Moreover, how it could impact on their maternal experience and ultimately contribute positively and/or negatively to their maternal identity and wellbeing. Mothers spoke about ‘*expecting*’ officers to treat them negatively as prisoners but appreciated that not all officers would be the same: ‘*you get bad bus drivers, you get bad prison officers*’ (Queenie); but as Mary stated, ‘*I didn’t expect them to treat me as a bad mother... who are they to judge me on that, they know nothing about me... or my life*’. Mothers spoke about the level of ‘*out and out judgement and disapproval*’ (Rita) they had experienced from some officers concerning their motherhood, and that this had had a definite impact on their mothering self-esteem and maternal identity:

“The way they look at you when they see you are pregnant... the look on their faces... it’s disgust, you can see it is... you know they are thinking what kind of mother will you be... I used to hide my belly as much as I could... they made me ashamed... I was already ashamed, but they made it worse.” (Kady)

“On D wing... the officers would say stuff yeah... they made all of us feel like we didn’t even deserve to be mothers let alone treat us like mothers... we all said it, we all felt it.” (Rita)

“He actually said to me these exact words, ‘what kind of mother are you? You must be really bad to have three kids taken off you?’... that nearly broke me you know because he was a decent bloke... that made it worse.” (Nicola)

Prison staff responses to the Mothers not only impacted on their maternal selves in terms of their positive maternal identity and wellbeing, but also their engagement in prison life and sentence planning and emotional wellbeing, as illustrated by Tanisha:

“Mr Green was so kind when my daughter was being bullied, he knew I wouldn’t be able to concentrate in the sentence planning meeting, so he asked for it to be postponed. If it had gone ahead that day I was so distracted I know I would not have joined in or seen the point to it - in fact I think I would have withdrew from the programme... but because he moved it and helped me speak to the school and my daughter to sort it out my mind was clear when we did have the meeting. I was happy and they were happy... but without Mr Green understanding it could have gone badly wrong.” (Tanisha)

Jaspreet and Tanya particularly spoke of how ‘good’ officers listened to their worries about losing their maternal role and encouraged them to be open with their families and children about their fears: both Mothers did this and described how their children and families reassured them and, as a result, their communication and contact improved as did their state of mind. Both women said this then allowed them to engage in the opportunities offered for progression in prison more fully than they had before. Mary also highlighted how conversations with one particular prison officer had prompted her to get back in touch with her children whom she had not seen for ‘years’ when they had been taken into care. Mary had believed her children *‘were better off without her’* and had *‘put them to the back of my mind’* for years, but the officer who spent time with her in what Mary described as a *‘non-judgey way’*, encouraged her to see that it was *‘never too late’* and to think about what *‘kind of Mary’* she would want her sons to see if they did come back into her life. Mary said this motivated her to *‘change’* and to access the support in prison that she had been unable to secure outside. She wanted to *‘be a mother again’*. The grandmothers in the study did not fare so well in terms of positive prisoner/staff relations. All of the grandmothers stated that they felt disrespected because of their age, but importantly also because of their grandmother role and status, and this had a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing. Echoing Wahidin’s (2004) findings, Mothers said they felt officers infantilised them and *‘had no respect for my age, what I had previously achieved, my status as a mother, and certainly not as a grandmother... as a grandmother, I was dismissed’ (Queenie)*, this impacted significantly on the grandmothers mental wellbeing -as did the fact they were often missed out of any ‘mother focussed’ attention or resources such as childcare ROTL’s.

Mothers felt that support during their imprisonment was inconsistent, reporting both positive and negative experiences, but clearly indicating that the level of support they felt/received was directly related to their mental wellbeing as mothers. PACT⁵, was reported by mothers as consistently helpful and supportive, several mothers stated they *‘would not have gotten through the sentence without PACT staff’*. Mothers felt that the carers and children were not adequately supported, financially or emotionally – leaving the children further disadvantaged

⁵ Prison Advice and Care Trust <https://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/>

and vulnerable to being taken into care later (which in fact happened in one of our cases), *'my sister couldn't cope, she put my kids in care' (Dee).*

It is recognised that peer support and friendships are of significance to women in custody, women fare less well than men if they spend long periods of time alone in their cells or with limited contact with each other. Women in my research told me the friendships they form with each other, particularly as mothers are often key to their emotional regulation and wellbeing, and in fact many suggested- to their survival. More than one woman told me that had they remained in closed conditions for much longer, they would have taken their life. (please see the ['Motherhood Disrupted'](#) paper for more detail).

In open conditions, not only are mothers afforded more freedom physically, but importantly mentally they are able to be more open about their experiences as mothers – and draw support from each other – which obviously has a positive impact on the mothers health and wellbeing. One mother told me;

"in closed conditions we don't know each other well, we are fearful of speaking about our children as we don't know who has care of their kids and who doesn't, whose kids are being taken by the social or where their kids are – we daren't ask because then the lid is off isn't it – and then you have to go back to your cell o your own – all that time alone to think about the mess you've made and how much you've lost – that's when women hurt themselves , kill themselves , I know I've wanted to – in open we can spend hours just talking about being a mum , sharing photos, just having normal conversations ... you feel like some of you is still a mum ... it matters".

Women speak of the value of these relationships, with many saying they wouldn't have gotten through their sentences without this support from other mothers, and mothers who experienced closed conditions have equally told me just how hard it was, just to decide to live. The rules of the institution and whether the prison was open or closed also had an impact on the quality of the visit for both mothers and visitors- which in turn also had an impact on maternal wellbeing. Mothers described how these rules around physical contact and free movement within the visiting space were inconsistent between prisons, even between those in the same category. Some prisons allowed only a first hug and then no further physical contact, this included the Mothers holding their very young babies or toddlers or allowing them on their knees. In other prisons (or in the special visits described above) this was allowed. In some prisons Mothers were not allowed out of their seats, which they found incredibly frustrating (and was a key factor in mothers taking the decision not to allow children to visit) - especially for Mothers of toddlers and younger children because children would go over to the play area (if there was one) to play with other children and the toys provided. Tia described how on one visit, her four-year-old and another visitor's child made friends and spent the whole visit playing in the play area in the far corner of the room, then sitting themselves down for their *'picnic'* on a separate table from their mothers. Tia stated it

was awful and frustrating, but she and the other mother felt helpless as they were not allowed out of their seats to interact:

"Me and the other mother just looked at each other and shrugged, we were gutted, but what can you do... they were happy". (Tia)

Mothers therefore sometimes spent the whole visit watching their child play from a distance with minimal mother/child interaction and would spend the visit time engaging with the caregiver or the professional (e.g. foster carer/social worker) who had accompanied the child on the visit. This would leave mothers upset and in a very vulnerable and negative state of mind post visits:

"I had to stay seated at all times, [the social worker] could move into the play area with my kid, but not me. I wasn't allowed... so for at least an hour of the visit I wouldn't even see her. I used to pray to get seated next to the play area... but usually I wasn't nowhere near it. One time my daughter fell over... I wasn't even allowed out my seat to pick her up... if that had happened outside and I ignored her crying... well then that would be abuse. Another time my daughter wanted to give me a picture... [it was] taken off her, not even allowed to show it me. So before she even got in she was upset already... then she wanted to bring some crayons and paper from the play area to sit with me... which is allowed... but this officer told her no. She went round and took crayons off all the kids. My daughter was broken, the visit got ended because my daughter was heartbroken, the social worker took her out and that was it over. I put a complaint in about that but the IMB⁶ never did nowt about it. All I could think about was how sad my daughter would be on her way home." (Sophie)

Another Mother was frustrated that not being allowed out of her seat prevented her from even 'doing the basics' for her children during visits:

"I just wanted to get them the stuff from the café, just to be able to buy their treats. Basic stuff... not even allowed that." (Tanisha)

It was clear that Tanisha saw buying provisions from the snack bar as an act of mothering. These frequent frustrations of their maternal role affected the Mothers wellbeing deeply and was one of the reasons cited as to why they might have only one, none, or infrequent visits with their children. This had obvious implications for the maintenance and strengthening of family ties and bonds and, ultimately, the Mothers' desistance (Farmer, 2019).

Mothers have described to me how the more stringent search and security measures in closed establishments have been experienced as so frightening or so damaging to them and their children that they make the heartrending decision not to allow all their children to visit at all (this

⁶ **Independent Monitoring Boards (IMB)** are statutory bodies established by the Prison Act 1952 to **monitor** the welfare of prisoners in the UK to ensure that they are properly cared for within Prison and Immigration Centre rules, whilst in custody and detention.

consideration is over and above concerns and difficulties around costs and location which are well documented elsewhere). One key aspect of visits in a closed prison is the lack of freedom and contact permitted – this has a direct impact on a mother’s relationship with her child and the quality of her contact. For example, in closed prisons, children, even babies and toddlers, are often not permitted to sit on their mothers’ knees – imagine having to explain to a three-year-old that has missed mummy, that they are not allowed a cuddle? One mother told me her child said

“but mummy I promise I’ll be good; shall I go tell the guards I’ll be good [if I can sit on your knee]”

Another mother told me her children cried so much about not being able to sit on her knee that the grandmother who brought them felt it was best to leave- as the children and mum were so distressed and were upsetting other children. This mother chose not to allow her children to ‘go through’ this again, and subsequently didn’t see her 3 and 4-year-old for another four months. She told me she felt suicidal after that visit (I don’t think I need to be any more explicit about the relationship of positive contact and emotional coping/regulation/wellbeing). One mother really highlighted the challenge of not being allowed out of her seat;

“My daughter (aged 2) took a fall, banged her head really hard on a table leg, I wasn’t even allowed out of my seat to go and pick her up, or comfort her and check she was ok... it was awful, on the outside that would be seen as my neglect- but in here its forced neglect. It’s just wrong on every level. I was scarred from that man – and maybe so was she”.

It is not surprising when mothers and children have such damaging and negative experiences, that mothers are regularly making the decision to not have visits with their children – the impact of which can be long lasting and devastating on both mothers and their children (as is further evidenced in my Doctoral thesis).

Several mothers in the study were evicted from their houses because of their sentences. Losing their home means many children are taken into care – and without a home it is impossible for families to reunite, it become a circular problem for many. Anna, wrote, *‘being evicted means landlords won’t give me a chance and the council don’t make a priority because I don’t have my kids yet, but I can’t get them because I don’t have a home. So, I’m stuck.’* For those not evicted, many faced leaving prison to accumulated debt and rent arrears, rendering the women vulnerable to future negative impact on health and wellbeing, eviction and/or re offending. Which of course also renders children vulnerable to disruption and homelessness.

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

This research provides empirical evidence of the disproportionality of punishment when a mother is criminalised and imprisoned. Alongside reiterating the widespread enduring harm

of maternal imprisonment caused to the children and families of imprisoned mothers; the study demonstrates the significant and sometimes life-threatening harm caused to an identity and role many women regard as their most important and reveals the significant impact of maternal imprisonment on mothers' health and wellbeing. Motherhood, maternal identity, maternal emotions and maternal role are important and *must* be factored into the effective care and supervision of mothers in the CJS. The Mothers ability to maintain a healthy maternal identity and an affirming maternal self-esteem and active mothering role, were affected, both positively and negatively by the prison space, rules, regimes and relationships. Maternal emotion and active mothering were of central importance to mothers during their incarceration and beyond, whether or not Mothers had the care of their children or were expecting to on release. Many of the challenges mothers in prison faced reflected the focus of the penal system and prison estate on male prisoners. Prison officer training is centred around the male estate, and officers do not currently receive more than a couple of training sessions specifically devoted to working with women prisoners. Only because of this current research have some officers received specific training for working with mothers at all (provided by the author). Thus, the Mothers felt their motherhood and maternal role was either essentially ignored by CJS staff, or was a source of judgment, mistrust, surveillance and control, which impacted on Mothers engagement and maternal self-esteem. This has to change for mothers wellbeing in prison to be improved.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

In considering the evidence from my research, a broad umbrella recommendation is that criminal justice for women and how it is approached must be fundamentally reconsidered. The research has evidenced the significant and consistent failure to meet the needs of women and mothers. A commitment to improved social justice is required to address the issues and experiences described in this research. Prison is a feminist issue of matricentric concern, not least because for women, especially mothers, the effects of criminalisation and imprisonment are experienced in a wider context of patriarchy, oppression, discrimination and disadvantage. Prison replicates the outside-inside. As this study has shown the effects of maternal imprisonment persist for decades, if not for life. As feminists we must challenge and replace the term 'female offender' with the more considered term 'criminalised women' or in the case of mothers 'criminalised mothers'. Doing so challenges the perception that once an offender always an offender but also and importantly, it leaves room for criticality in the discussion about how the woman/mother became criminalised in the first instance. We need to ask was it right and just that she was criminalised and what was the role of the state, or the relevance of our social structures more broadly in her criminalisation. Based on the evidence of this study specific recommendations are:

1. Commitment to Social Justice. First and foremost there must be a commitment to minimising opportunities for women to become criminalised, facilitated via

improved social justice and early support. The study revealed the many missed opportunities to support mothers much earlier and the impact of this. This requires supporting families and actively tackling inequalities, like food poverty, improving access to mental health and addiction/trauma support. Maintaining partnership working and early intervention for families, requires a continued commitment from the government in terms of resources and funding, which would reduce the risks of offending for mothers and its implications. The Matricentric-feminist criminological lens of this research has provided understanding for how multiply disadvantaged mothers often become criminalised unnecessarily. Thus, alongside improved social-justice, early support and diversion away from the CJS is essential. There must be a commitment to support and replicate the many successful, but still nationally varied Diversion and Deferred Caution/Charge Schemes⁷ thereby reducing the numbers of criminalised women entering the system at all.

2. The Courts. Turning attention to the Courts, Magistrates (and it is most often magistrates who sentence women), *must at least* adhere to current guidelines (The Bangkok Rules) far more consistently than they currently do. There needs to be accountability of sentencers when they do fail to adhere to guidelines. Mothers described horrendous experiences from the courts where inappropriate comments were made and guidelines were not followed. In order for the Courts to have a more compassionate, informed response to criminalised women and mothers, there should be some consideration given to 'Women Only' courts, where Magistrates in those Courts have *chosen* to sit. Furthermore, have undergone gender specific, matricentric and trauma-informed training concerning women's pathways into and out of crime and the impact of imprisonment on women. Furthermore, no mother with dependent children should ever be sentenced unexpectedly or without a PSR. In the case of *all* mothers, if a custodial sentence is imperative and likely, there must be a period of deferment to allow mothers to make provision for her family and prepare her children. Immediate custody and/remand should cease, and remand should *never* be used if a custodial sentence would not be a *definite* outcome at sentencing, as currently over 60% of women remanded do not go on to receive a custodial sentence (PRT, 2019). This would avoid situations as described in this study where mothers were imprisoned not knowing who would collect her child from school, and which had a dangerous and detrimental impact on the Mothers mental wellbeing. Pregnant and new Mothers described the additional harm and disproportionate harm caused by their imprisonment. This could be avoided by a cessation of sending

⁷ Several CPS Areas have bespoke facilities providing tailored support to help address the particular needs of women and the drivers behind their criminal behavior, for example, drug or alcohol abuse or involvement in an abusive relationship.

These facilities are provided by both statutory and voluntary sector agencies. They may be, for example, dedicated Women's Community Projects or similar 'One-Stop-Shops'.

Where such facilities exist, and a conditional caution may be an appropriate disposal, prosecutors should consider the suitability of the offender for a Women Specific Condition, especially where a referral to a Women's Community Project might lead to the breaking of their cycle of offending.

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/diverting-women-offenders-and-women-specific-condition-within-national-conditional>

pregnant Mothers to prison. MBU's should be community based and modelled on matricentric-feminist principles of support and empowerment.

3. Prison. If we are to continue to send women to prison (and the preferred option is wherever possible we don't- especially in the case of pregnant and new mothers), the additional trauma caused by maternal imprisonment and the associated disproportionate harms described by the mothers must be addressed. Large women's prison as we know them should be replaced with smaller, community based units and modelled on matricentric-feminist principles of support and empowerment. In the meantime, the institutional thoughtlessness and uncompassionate policies and practices concerning motherhood evidenced in the study, must be acknowledged, challenged and addressed. Following matricentric training for prison staff, compassion and understanding must underpin work with all mothers in prison. Motherhood must be factored into sentence planning in terms of consideration of needs, but also outcomes and preparation for release. Definitions of who is eligible for ROTL and Child Care leave must be broadened to include grandmothers, who described feeling 'excluded' from such provisions. Consideration must be given for how to improve and maintain contact and relationships with children and caregivers, (For example improved in-cell and video calling facilities – especially important if Covid restrictions remain in place, and welcoming child friendly visiting spaces, and subsidised telephone contact with children). All of which would positively assist and support maternal-identity, role and wellbeing. It is imperative that reception phone calls occur. Delays in facilitating contact with children and caregivers should be avoided at all costs if we are to reduce the trauma, self-harm and suicidal thoughts evidenced by the Mothers. There must be an urgent review of the management of all female prisoners particularly concerning open/closed conditions and the regime restrictions, which the Mothers powerfully described impacted on theirs and sometimes their children's' wellbeing. To reduce the additional punishment and harm caused to mothers and their children prison-moves at short notice must be avoided and should never occur when an imminent visit with children is booked. Consideration must be given of how best to support mothers who are involved in proceedings involving their children and 'bridges' facilitated between inside and outside support resources and caregivers, especially in preparation for release. This could be achieved by an expansion of the prison social-work role. Programmes for mothers, over and above parenting programmes must become commonplace in prison, as must 'safe' spaces to facilitate supportive relationships and conversations about motherhood and to prepare for release. Which the Mothers described as so important to their wellbeing.
4. Open /Closed conditions. Most women's prisons should be recategorized as 'open prisons' on their function and day to day running – to reflect the risk levels of most women more accurately of the female prisoner population (currently 10/12 women's prisons are classed as closed prisons – which affects women's prison

experience in every way) . No women ought to held in security conditions over and above her identified risk level, it should never be permitted to move a woman from open to closed conditions for reasons of convenience or over population –(which my research evidence was common practice). **The proposed increase of 500 cells with improved conditions for mothers MUST be accompanied by the closure of 500 cells in closed conditions- no further expansion of the female estate ought to be permitted.**

5. Visits and Contact. To increase the wellbeing of mothers in prison wherever possible visits ought to model the principles and practices identified in the evaluation of the ‘Visiting Mum’ project at HMP Eastwood park prison⁸. This standard of excellence ought to be replicated in every female establishment and given permanent funding. In the immediate term, the rules around kissing, cuddling and contact between a mother and her child/ren ought to be revisited, with contact permitted in all but the most extreme of circumstances. Similarly, mother’s ought to be allowed to play and engage with the children actively, and not confined to one seat with children off in far corner of the room. If this means that visits are permanently staffed (and adequately staffed) by 3rd sector voluntary organisations then so be it – minimal HMP staff could be used to offer overall supervision by way of CCTV – thereby reducing HMP staffing of visits, but importantly improving the quality for visits for mothers and children. Which as previously stated will have improved outcomes for mother and child wellbeing in and after custody, but arguably also positive outcomes in relation to prisoner management and engagement. My research revealed that many mothers make the difficult decision to not allow their children to visit, especially those on short custodial sentences – specifically because the visiting experience is so negative – as my research has demonstrated this has a negative impact on mother/child wellbeing that endured long after the mother has been released. There must never be occasions where mothers are not permitted their ‘reception phone call’ to allow them to check on their children and their wellbeing – my research evidenced that failure to facilitate this call in a timely manner was commonplace – several mothers in my research described this period of uncertainty as incredibly difficult and some mothers felt it contributed to suicidal and self-harm ideas. It most certainly contributed negatively to wellbeing in the already challenging early days in prison period.
6. Family and Caregivers. The Mothers described struggling with the family relationships during and after prison. To better support Mothers and families and improve outcomes, there must be improved support for caregivers and prisoner’s families during the period and of incarceration and post-release. Mothers described

⁸ Rees, A. Staples, E. & Maxwell, N. ‘Visiting Mum’ Evaluation of the scheme at HMP Eastwood park; available at: sites.cardiff.ac.uk/cascade/files/2017/09/Final-PACT-report-Final-version.-12.7.17.pdf

how providing formal support for families engaged in caregiving for children of imprisoned parents especially financial support, would improve the stability of caregiver relationships and reduce the tensions between caregivers and imprisoned mothers. This would result in better co-parenting partnerships and improved outcomes for Mothers and their children. Furthermore, Mothers stated that positive caregiving relationships would improve their mental health and wellbeing in custody, enabling them to engage more fully in sentence planning and rehabilitation.

7. **Post-Release Support.** The Mothers described a lack of post-release support, regarding their maternal identity and role. Post-release support must be gender-specific and must be mindful of the challenges faced by reintegrating mothers. Motherhood, maternal emotions and maternal identity must be factored into supervision support and release planning. Wherever possible post-release and supervised mothers should be supported by women's centres. In order to provide effective support to criminalised women, women's centres must be centrally and permanently funded in order to deliver good quality, multi-agency effective support. There needs to be some recognition of the enduring impact of maternal imprisonment with the possibility of ongoing support (for mothers no longer subject to licence), or an outreach for post-release support attached to and delivered by women's centres. Probation staff must receive guidance and training in relation to the supervision of mothers and have an increased awareness of the need to work in a trauma-informed and mindful way with post-release mothers and mothers under supervision. All of the above would contribute to improve outcomes and assist mothers. Mitigating some of the challenges described in this study.

8. **Multi-agency Working.** The Mothers' narratives clearly demonstrated the multiple missed opportunities for support, despite repeated requests. There must be a 'joined up' whole system approach to improving the care and outcomes for criminalised mothers involving all of the agencies that make up the social and criminal justice systems. This would seek to minimise the many missed opportunities to support mothers and divert and support mothers away from criminality and prosecution. Throughcare, consistency, compassion, understanding and support are key to working positively and effectively with mothers in the CJS. Where it was done well the Mothers were able to articulate the positive impact it had on their lives, equally where it was not, the consequences were vast. Agencies working together, must seek to empower women and mothers to move forwards with positivity and to pursue opportunities as opposed to focusing only on supervision and compliance.

9. **Motherhood, mothering from and after prison and maternal emotions are central to most women's experiences of custody.** These needs are not currently being address adequately. Programmes such as the MIO need to be permanently funded and

delivered across the female estate. Similarly, their importance for woman post release cannot be overstated (also developed and ready to go). A commitment must be made to staff training in relation to working positively and supportively with imprisoned mothers. (which has already been developed by the author and delivered to Unlocked Graduates and Sodexo staff)

10. Inclusion, Voice and Valuing Lived Experience. Many of the mothers expressed a desire to work in the CJS with women in similar situations. Several went on to do so, some in leadership roles where they are able to guide and influence positive practice. In line with matricentric-feminist principles of empowerment and voice, there must be a commitment to involving service users and others with lived experience, to inform, shape and lead policy and practice concerning criminalised women. Matricentric-feminism and feminist principles provide the scaffold on which future developments can be framed.

4. Appendix

Appendix 1; case Studies Mary and Cassie

Rather than interrupting Mary and Cassie's narratives with author commentary as was this appendix presents Mary and Cassie's narratives uninterrupted (as presented and extracted from a co-produced forthcoming chapter written by myself, Mary and Cassie *pseudonyms.

**Please note the case studies may be challenging and triggering to read.*

Mary

I'm at a loss where to begin. I'm not sure where my story starts and finishes. I suppose when I was born would be a good place to start.

When I was born, I can't imagine that my mother loved me even then. I often think about babies that are planned and wanted; I think they must know, the babies I mean. I think they must feel loved even before they were born. I see pregnant mothers stroking their full bellies and talking, even singing to their baby, excited about their child's life to come. I genuinely can't imagine my mother ever having done that with me. I was unplanned, an inconvenience, an unwanted interruption of her life and her 'work'. I'm sure I would have gotten in the way of her work save for those perverts who like pregnant working girls. It makes me feel dirty even now knowing my mum must have been paid for her body to be

used with me inside it. I feel like I must have absorbed some of that dirt, some of that shame. I've read that science says that unborn babies pick up on their mothers' moods so it stands to reason I must have picked up on some of what was going on. I know bonding can start before babies are born, so I guess so can indifference, and that's what I always felt my mother felt about me. Indifference- like it didn't matter if I was there or not. I know for certain I don't remember a single day where I felt loved by my mother, not one. It wasn't even as if I had a father to make up for the lack of love from her either. Neither me or her have any idea who my father even is. Some faceless nameless person who paid my mother to rent her body by the hour.

I used to fantasise that it was someone famous, that somehow, he would know I existed and would one day come and rescue me, take me away from the shit that was my life. To be fair I'd have settled for anyone they didn't have to be famous. My mum did keep me though, for that I suppose I should be grateful. But again, sometimes I think about what my life would have been like if she hadn't. I might have been adopted by someone rich and normal and lived in Crouch End. I love words, maybe I could have got an education and been someone. I might have spent my time in libraries and theatres and had a brother called Charles!

Instead I spent my childhood in a crummy bedsit, smelly dark and dank, with two rooms so I couldn't even escape her at home. If I wasn't trying to avoid seeing her 'at work' I was trying to avoid the men who came to her who saw me as an added bonus, like a two for one offer in a supermarket. I try to convince myself my mother didn't plan or take payment when I was used, or even that she didn't know when they used me to- but the older I got the harder that got to believe. Then I would try really hard to block those thoughts by doing stuff I shouldn't have even known about so young, (self-harm and alcohol). But I guess she did know; I have to accept she did. I hope she felt like she got value for money!

I only really remember my mother as just being 'there', not absent, but not present either. Drunk more often than not and she was obsessed with her pills. I don't know what tablets they were, but I know she was stressed and strung out if she didn't have them – she would scream at me to find them – she would be hysterical. They definitely meant more to her than I did. I can't imagine her getting that stressed if she couldn't find me- I always felt like I was a burden, in the way, an irritation. So as soon as I was able to, I left. I left home just before I was 15, funnily enough I used to see all these posters about missing people all round London. Never saw a single one of me. I don't expect she even noticed I was gone. That was the last I saw her. I never went back. Why would I? I heard she died from the drink in the end – I knew it would be either her men, the drugs or the drink that killed her – she died her death how she lived her life, ugly and messy.

It's probably not surprising that I entered the world I did. I never have sold myself for sex, I'd never do that, not willingly anyway, but the drink got me too. In some ways I understand her a bit better now – maybe she used the drink to block it all out too- I get that. I would end up trusting men who would hurt me, ply me with drugs, try to get me on the game, knock me about. It was like I had a sign on my head saying, 'do this, treat me like a cunt, I'm used to it!'. I moved from pillar to post, sometimes to get away from men, sometimes because I was bored, sometimes because I just had no money to stay, once because I was banned from my

local off licence! Then I got pregnant, I felt like the happiest woman in the world. I was sad that like me my child wouldn't know its dad. I didn't know for sure who it was, but when they were older, I made something up, told my sons he was a good kind man who got run over buying me flowers – a dead dad is better than no dad. I was so happy to be pregnant, a child to love me, for me to love right back my own little family. But I worried all the time that the social would take my baby. I was ashamed I didn't know who the dad was, so I told them lies too but I think they knew. Then when I was about 6 months pregnant, I met a man, Ted, I thought was going to be good and kind- I really liked him, I wanted us to be a family a proper family. But then one night when he was off his face, he raped me and beat me up, he told me I deserved it and I think I just figured he was right. I must have. Wasn't that what always happened?

After that he just got more and more controlling, nasty in fact – but I just accepted it as my lot – he put on a good front for the social [social workers] so I didn't feel I could ask for help – not that I would have anyway I was too scared they'd take my son. So, in the end I did everything he asked, he wouldn't buy nappies or baby milk if I didn't do what he said... everything he said. So in the end I was 'moving things' for him, I never asked what, but I expected it was drugs. If I didn't do it, he would beat me up in front of my son and I didn't want him to be scared like I was, so I just did what he told me, to protect my son. So, I just fell into that lifestyle – it became normal to me. Then I got caught, he would have killed me if I'd grassed him up so in court, I just plead guilty and accepted it. It was my first time in trouble, so I didn't think I'd go down. But I did, I was sent to jail. No warning just bam, off you go. My son had been taken into care when I was remanded, the judge said in court that my son was being 'properly cared for now' and I knew that was a dig at me. That he thought I didn't care for him properly and he was better off without me, and he was right. I was a shit mother; I'd hated my mother's life and yet I made all the same mistakes. I hated myself.

When I went to prison, I found out I was pregnant, they test everyone in reception, I'd had no idea. I didn't know how to feel. I was happy and sad, sad my baby would grow in prison, but happy because for a while anyway I was safe. It was just me and him. I had the chance to be one of those mums who could stroke her bump and sing to her baby. I loved him before he even came because I had peace and space to love him. I wasn't worried about the next battering or paying bills or avoiding getting caught. Folk used to say 'aint you stressed about being pregnant in prison', but it was a lot less stressful than my life outside, so not at first no I wasn't. I knew it was another boy even before the scan, and I was glad. My world was no world for girls. In my world boys were safer. I was determined to be a better mother this time. To get my oldest one back and to be a proper mother, to cook and make biscuits and to take them to school – and be on time! In prison all I thought about was being a good mum, I was sure I could do it. I wanted it so much. For them. I got out when I was 7 1/2 months pregnant- I had been so scared he would be born in prison, but they let me go a week early to be sure. But there he was, waiting for me at the gate – to this day I don't know how he knew I was getting out. As soon as I saw him I lost hope. I was his meal ticket, of course he wasn't going to give up on me. He told me he had jobs for me, and I told him I wasn't going to do that no more, so he beat me black and blue. I thought I'd lose my baby he hurt me so bad but bless him he stayed put.

Then on it went. My life continued as before, only now it was worse. He even made me visit his mates in person to take them drugs, pretending to be their girlfriends. That became my life – he said he was easier to smuggle because I was pregnant. I got supervised visits with my older boy and they were taking about giving me him back as long as I gave Ted up. I knew I had to for my sons. I was going to too, honestly after that last job, it was going to be my last job, and I was going to keep half the money and run. But I was drinking a bit again, I know it sounds crazy but I was so worried about losing my baby, and then losing both my sons forever, the only way I could cope with the anxiety and the worry was to just take the edge off with the drink. I had this one last job to do then I was leaving him – but I got caught taking drugs into prison didn't I. My solicitor told me I would not get jailtime, not with being so pregnant I was due any day.

In court the Judge actually said, 'what kind of mother are you?' he actually said that. He said my child being in care was his best chance of having a 'stable life'. How could he even know that? He didn't know me; I was going to be such a good mum this time I was determined to do it right this time. But in the blink of an eye, and because of him, Ted, that was it my chance to be good mum gone. I knew my son would be taken as soon as he was born. All I had left was to make the most of the couple of weeks I had left with him inside me – I must be only mum in the world who was delighted her baby was late. Every moment was precious and meant he was mine for longer, just me and him in our bubble – I barely even noticed I was in prison. But then the day came, the day he was born, the day they took him. I don't think it's right you know that they take them so quick- why couldn't I have had him a few days . Because I knew what was coming, I wasn't going to look at him or hold him at all – I was scared I wouldn't be able to cope – wouldn't be able to let him go. So, I'd told them to take him straight away. But when he came out of me, I changed my mind. I asked for him and I held him. He was so peaceful, he looked at me like he was studying me, pleading with me almost. I suppose that was just the guilt making me think that, but I felt like he was willing me to be better. I promised him I would be better, from now on. I promised him. I fed him – I felt good about that – like he would always have a bit of me with him. Silly I know. Then when he was sleeping, so he wouldn't know, I let them take him.

At first, I didn't cry I remember just staring into space like I was frozen. I got up and went to the toilet and then I just broke down. I sobbed and sobbed and sobbed in that manky toilet. I felt broken, like I had nothing and no one, no purpose, no point, nothing. I'm ashamed to admit it now, but all I wanted at that point in time was some gear or some wine to numb the pain. The hurt was unbearable, and I just wanted it to go. I know not even half an hour had gone since I promised my boy I'd be better but right at that moment in time, I just didn't know how to be, or even how I could be. My whole shitty life was passing before me and it was all rubbish, all of it. Now I'd lost both my boys and I just didn't know how I'd cope.

I was sent back to prison that night and locked in my cell. Thank god I wasn't alone I had a pad mate, or I don't think I'd be here now. She knew how I'd be feeling bad bless her and she had got gear ready for me to take, that probably sounds weird and sick, but it was the most caring thing she could have done. I took it gratefully. The rest of my sentence passed in a blur, a haze. I don't recall a single officer asking me how I was or how I was coping, other

mothers did but not the screws. One actually told me that it was 'how it should be', that I 'deserved it' and 'prison was no place for babies anyway'- which I agreed with to be honest but that didn't help the pain. I remember thinking prison aint no place for mothers either, but I didn't say it . I didn't say it.

When I got out, I was determined to go straight, to be good. I was determined to get my boys back. Probation helped me get a job and I moved out of the hostel. I refused to have anything to do with my ex and moved towns so he couldn't find me. I stayed off the gear except for sleepers, but they were prescribed. Social services started to let me see my boys, supervised at first then after 10 months I could see them on my own and then they came home. I was so so so happy to have home. We had two relatively uneventful years, just me and my boys. It was good, we were totally skint, but we had each other. Then I met him, Dean, and as usual when a man is in my life , it went to shit. At first, he was charming, lovely even, he loved the boys, they even started to call him dad. It was slow at first, but then it started, the jealousy the control the accusations. It go to the point where I'd even put the boys to bed early and go with them just to avoid him. I did everything I could to avoid pissing him off , but there was always something. Every time I thought I knew 'the rules' there was a new one. Eventually the slaps came, they turned to punches and then came the rest. He started asking me to move some parcels for him, again I never knew for sure what was in them, but I could guess. He said he'd hurt my boys if I didn't do as he said so what choice did, I have , and I know he would have. He was a sadistic bastard. I refused one day, and he killed the boy's hamster, snapped its neck right in front of me and told me he would do the same to them. Its sounds mad now saying it to you but I believed him. After that he didn't even have to persuade me, I did whatever he asked. I couldn't leave, I had no family no money nowhere to go, no way to feed my kids. So I just took it and bit by bit I started drinking again, it was the only way to cope. I felt such a failure ,I hated myself I hated him I hated my life what my life had been what it was shaping up to be, I hated everything. I remember my oldest son one day asking me why I fell over all the time and why I got so many bruises. My heart broke for him. I felt so guilty but weirdly I also remember feeling proud that he didn't know why, to me it meant I was doing something right. Sick I know. But that didn't last anyway.

I know they heard shouting, especially the oldest one but I kidded myself they didn't really know anything. My oldest staring bullying the youngest though, and now with the benefit of hindsight I know that's because of what he was seeing. Dean got worse and worse and I just disappeared, not literally (I wish), but the 'me' that I'd found in those two good years was gone. He would bring his mates round and I'd have to score for all of them and then one day he just told them they could have sex with me. I don't know to this day why I let them, why I didn't fight, why I didn't just leave – but I didn't. I just let them, and they paid him. I just got drunk after. That was it, I had come full circle I was literally my mother. My worst fear. After that I spent my days in a haze of alcohol and drugs. I would manage to get the boys to school and then my day would disappear. I didn't do much else with them I'm ashamed to say. I was a failure of a mother, I felt guilty when I was sober and it all hurt, so I just avoided being sober. Ironically, I think I now understood my mother even more.

Life would have just carried on like that I guess until one day I just 'snapped'. I'd dropped the boys off at school and came back to find a houseful, I knew what was coming. Afterwards, his 'friends' had just gone, four of them this time, all had taken their turn. He was asleep in the chair off his head on something. I don't really know what came over me or what happened all I can remember is seeing the boys cricket bat leaning against the wall and I picked it up went behind the chair and hit him over the head with it. I can't remember how many times, but I know he was unconscious. I phoned the police and waited for them to come. I literally have no memory of this, but I was arrested and remanded. I plead guilty to GBH because my brief said if I didn't, they would go for attempted murder.

If I'd known that last night was to be the last time, I put my boys to bed I would have read them a story, I would have tucked them in. I didn't know I'd already taken them to school for the last time ever and I didn't even kiss them, that was all I could think about when I was remanded. They were taken into care and I tortured myself with how scared they must have been. To this day I don't even know who picked them up from school that day. I didn't think I could have hated myself more than I already did. I just existed from that day forward. Many times, in the prison sentence that came, I self-harmed, I tried to kill myself. I didn't feel I had anything to live for, but every time I was caught in time. I felt like nothing, no one ever really asked me why I did the things I did, but I don't know I would have told them anyway, they would have just said I deserved it. I got through my sentence somehow, but without seeing my boys at all. The social wouldn't bring them, said it was too far and not in their interests or something like that. My personal officer said to me I should just forget I ever had children because no way was I getting them back. So that was it, I got out eventually, no money, no home, no job and no kids. What was even the point in trying to stay sober. In my view my destiny had been decided when I was born my mother's child. My fate was sealed.

So really the next ten years are a blur, in an out of prison drunk and sober, mostly drunk. Lots of short prison sentences for stupid things, sometimes just three weeks, I couldn't even tell you how many sentences of less than three months I've done but I know it's a lot. I felt like I was on a conveyor belt- the officers would laugh when I came back and say 'you again'- I felt like a joke, everything felt inevitable. There didn't seem to any point even trying without them, I didn't see my boys at all, I had no fixed address most of the time so the social lost contact with me, not that I think they tried very hard anyway, my boys were in care. I have to be honest and say I tried not to think about them, they were better off without me and really that part of my life was over. I didn't talk about them even – it was just too painful. What use was I as a mother anyway no way would I have wanted them to see me like that, I'd seen my mother like that, and it wasn't pretty. So, I was happy imagining them with a good mum and dad in a nice area with a nice school and doing well, I even thought they would have their own rooms and tv's and bikes. All things I would never have been able to give them. They were in a much better place and I was glad. The only downside was I needed to drink to blot out the pain of it all, which mean robbing to pay for it. So that was my life year after year.

Then on my last sentence what changed it all, was this one officer, young lass she was, but she asked me why I drank, she asked me about my life and if I had kids. No one in years and

years had even mentioned my kids, and years and years longer since I spoke about my childhood. She asked me what I would want my boys to see if I ever saw them again, that made me want to do better. I didn't want them to be ashamed. She listened, she got me support, she got me counselling and drink support, and even made sure it would carry on when I was released. Without her I truly think I'd be dead now. Maybe the timing was just right, I was older and sick of the life I'd lived and was living, but I do think it was because she just gave me time. She wanted to understand. It was hard because I really was ashamed of me as a mum, but I knew that if I really wanted to stop drinking, I needed to face my demons, and being a shit mum like my mum was my biggest demon.

Anyway, to cut an even longer story short, I got help through my women's centre, I got clean, I got sober and I still am. It wasn't easy, but I did it. I got myself a little job in a supermarket and I love it and I volunteer at the women's centre every week. The staff at the centre and the women and mothers I work with, all say I do a great job and I know it helps the women to speak to someone who has gone through it and totally gets where they are coming from. I've been there years now. It helps me make sense of my experience too because I know I'm making a difference to them; I know that sounds big headed, but I am! I never thought I'd say this, but I'm dead proud of me! With my support workers help I found out where my boys were and after nearly 30 years apart we met. I can't tell you how amazing it was to see them, but oh my god the guilt. Turned out they hadn't had the good life I'd imagined all those years. They hadn't had a good time in Care and had had several foster homes, some of them awful. Both of them have been in and out of prison too which I know is my fault. The life they'd had, god I can't bear to think about it really. I had ruined my life, but the real tragedy is I ruined theirs. We are taking baby steps; we have a lot to catch up on. The boys are angry with me and rightly so, but we are getting there. I'm actually a granny too now, so exciting, one thing is for sure I know I will be a much better Nanny than I ever could have been a mum. I'll always be that mother that went to prison but maybe it's not too late for me after all.

Mary

Reading Mary's narrative, it is impossible not to recognise the many missed opportunities to offer support. Support that might have prevented Mary's criminalisation and /or imprisonment. Which in turn might have mitigated the enduring harm caused not only to Mary but also to her children. Mary undoubtedly shows strength, resilience and determination but in a relatively wealthy, contemporary society should her journey have been this hard or this isolated? Mary's pathway through offending and to prison is not an unusual one, sadly neither is the lack of opportunity for support. Clarke and Chadwick (2018) highlight that it is often the individual women who themselves are punished and bear the brunt of the multiple failures that have most often befallen women, ergo mothers prior to them being imprisoned. Mary could and should have been supported at any number of points on her journey to prison, as a child and as an adult, instead, patriarchy, perceptions of and the reality of 'double deviancy', and oppression (Carlen 1998), conspired to frustrate her attempts to mother through adversity or to secure the support she so

desperately needed. Illustrating the power of kindness, of trauma informed practice and of gendered responses to criminalisation, Mary was finally able to reconnect with her children, be supported away from her previous coping strategies (that had led to her offending) and look forward to being a grandmother. The tragedy is the needless length of time it took, and the pain caused to her and her children in the process.

The chapter now hands over to Cassie, who also illustrates how her pathway into offending was triggered initially by abuse, but again reveals how her desistance was influenced by her desire to be and be seen as a 'good mum'. Cassie again demonstrates the resilience – i.e.. the ability to find agency in the face of multiple oppressions (Carlen 1985), of women and mothers fighting their way through the criminal justice system.

Cassie,

Thanks for asking me to do this, I feel like it's a great opportunity for me to reflect on and show off about how far I've come. Yes, I went to prison and yes, I did drugs for a lot of years, but you know what and I know it sounds weird, but I was still a good mum. I was the best mum I could be. If I knew when I was going to be on a bender and always made sure my kids were safe at my mums. Everyone knew I took drugs and why, I was gang raped and it was a very public case in my town. I struggled to deal with it and drugs became my coping mechanism. But, and this is a big but, but I know my kids would tell you this, I'm a good mum. They stopped me from sliding all the way down, all the way in. They kept me far enough out of the scene that I never quite lost control. I wouldn't have no dealers at the house, and I was careful where I did drugs and who with, so nothing got back to my kids or my kids dads. It wasn't easy and at times I worried I wasn't being a good mum – but I also know how much I wanted to be. My mum was a good mum, is a good mum and I wanted my kids to have those memories too. So I made sure I took them to school, I was tidy I was clean, always clean, they were well looked after, and we managed. We had fun, we had picnics, don't get me wrong it wasn't a fairy tale. We didn't have a lot of money, or fancy cars or holidays, but then neither did anyone else where I come from, but we did have, and still do have love and lots of it. My mum helped a lot, but really, I just managed, for them, because of them, my kids.

Then one day I just decided that was it, I wasn't going to take anything anymore, I'd had one really short spell in prison years before, and yes it was a nightmare, and yes it affected my kids, still does, but I'd kept on with the women's centre to see my drugs worker ever since I'd been released, and I told her what happened. My daughter who was about 10 by his time, well she found my stash. I will never forget it, I will never forget her questions, the disappointment in her face or my shame. From that day to this I've never touched anything, not even a headache tablet, and I swear on my kids' lives that's true. From that day I was determined to put it all behind me and to do I everything I could to get rid of that disappointment on my daughter's face. I was honest with her, I told her the truth and I told her why I used. You might think that's wrong because she was young, but I didn't want no more lies. I went to the centre and told my drugs worker what had happened and that I was

done, she said to me 'Cassie', she said, 'I'm proud of you, I knew this day would come and now it has now we move forwards'. She was right I hadn't moved forwards for years; I was stuck, and I didn't realise it. I started to volunteer at the women's centre, mainly at first to keep me busy -but then I loved it , I really loved helping the other women and I knew what life they were living so they trusted me. My drugs worker encouraged me to a counselling course, they paid for it at the centre. I passed with flying colours and so then they encouraged me to do a degree. At first, I was like 'don't be bloody stupid a degree me//' But anyway eventually I did it, I loved being a student and I loved that my kids were proud of me. We used to all do our homework together at the dining table. It was funny. The kids found it funny, but I could see in their eyes they were proud of me. That meant everything to me. I even heard one of them bragging once that I was studying. It was nice, I was doing something they were proud of. It made me feel like I was being the mum I was supposed to be, a good mum. Most of all though, I gave them time, I was careful to make sure I was at school events, I took them swimming when I could afford it, I baked with them when I can - I still do, it's our thing . I literally am like supremum – only better! Anyway so yes, I do all that and now I work at the women's centre full time too. I'm knackered but I'm happy. I have a proper job and I know my work makes a difference to the lives of women, who are like I used to be. I tell them my story and it gives them hope. My kids are proud of me and I'm proud of me. I want to be able to show other women, other mothers' life can be good after prison, you can go to prison and still come out and be a good mum. I know because I've done it.

Appendix 2

The Mothering Inside Out (MIO) programme.

As mentioned in the introduction, central to my research findings, has been the conclusion that paying attention to, understanding and supporting motherhood and maternal emotion, is of huge significance in relation to women in prison. As evidenced by the significantly lower reoffending rates of mothers who have been in MBU's and places like Trevi house, mothers supported to mother and not separated from their children fare better, emotionally, psychologically and from an offender point of view- than those separated, in what we have come to experience as the 'usual' way. Whilst I do not believe MBU's are perfect in their current form (I do not believe they should be attached to prisons or staffed by prison staff – see evidence in publications, nor are application processes and rejection rates currently acceptable). I believe they demonstrate how essential it is for a woman to be supported in her mothering.

Most women in prison are mothers and grandmothers, (it is important to acknowledge that mothering doesn't end when a child reaches 18), a mother, consumed by guilt and shame, not supported in her role or identity may feel as if she has nothing to lose if she loses her children or they feel lost to her. This has a huge impact on levels of self-harm, suicide attempts, engagement in sentence planning, behaviour on the wings and desistance. Drawing from my research and research findings I developed a programme for mothers called the Mothers Inside Out programme (MIO). This programme is designed to

acknowledge mothers as mothers, support them in creating and/or maintaining positive relationships with their children, but also importantly in SAFE space enables mothers to recognise the impact of their offending or negative choices, on their children. It also prepares women to have more realistic goals and expectations about release. Most mothers in prison have an understandable wish and hope that 'all will be ok' when they leave prison – that 'everything will just go back to normal'. However, the reality is that they face many challenges on release, and there are relationships to be re-negotiated, a whole gamut of issues related to family life that they hadn't expected. The programme helps women prepare for this so that women are less likely to feel overwhelmed and return to offending and substance misuse as a means of coping or self-sabotaging.

I have piloted the programme (and have piloted some staff training about working with mothers too), with the Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT). Who have now secured funds to roll out the programme across the female estate. The programme, designed to be ran over 6 full day sessions in three weeks (2x weekly), ensures that women even on short sentences will be able to complete the programme.

All of the mothers who completed the programme gave the course 10/10 and stated they would recommend the course to all mothers, they all said they would like to see the course rolled out across the female estate and thought it was worthwhile. One mum, who was a regularly self-harmed ordinarily, did not self-harm once during the programme – she gave the reason for this as *"I felt safe and supported here, all the turmoil in my head about my son was dealt with here- I had an outlet"*. Another mum who at the start of the programme initially told us *"I don't know why I'm here, I'm a rubbish mum – I don't think I deserve to be one- my kids are with my dad permanently so I'm not a mum really "*. She told us all during the course the biggest reason she used alcohol and drugs (which inevitably led to offending behaviour), was the guilt she felt about being a bad mum. She felt she had nothing else to lose. By the end of the programme, via the exercises and vitally, by the support of the other mothers she was able to stand up on the last day, when asked to reveal what she had learned from the course, she replied;

"that I AM a mum, I have good qualities as well as bad, this is temporary, I will get out and I will be the best mum I can be to my children – even if I don't get them back with me, I can see them and be a good mum. I want to make them proud of me."

There wasn't a dry eye in the house, I can't tell you what a leap this was for her, the peer support in the group was amazing to witness. Please see examples of feedback from mothers themselves.

PACT secured funding to successfully to roll out the MIO across to other prisons and this programme will resume as the covid restrictions ease. I am working closely with Sodexo to design and provide programmes, resources and staff training concerning understanding and supporting motherhood and maternal identity – **with the explicit aim of improving health and wellbeing for mothers in prison.**

Examples of Feedback from the mothers who completed the pilot MIO at HMP Downview.

Examples of feedback in the mother's own words.

'being on this course is the longest Ive ever gone in prison without self-harming and that's because I had a safe space to be a mum and talk about my kids and talk about what it feels like to be a mum in prison – and to feel understood and listen to'.

"I've learned in a safe way, the impact my choices have had on my family, especially my children – I want to put this right and now I have a better idea how to do it"

"I was motivated to do this course as I want to be a better mother. It's a safe space to talk about my children, Ive learned how to manage my emotions better which just has meant I can cope better and be better in prison".

"I felt so much better sharing my mum emotions, it was comfortable, and the group are amazing, I draw strength from all of them"

"learning from the case studies is a good way to teach us and to make us think about everything- what we have done but also most importantly how we can limit the harm and prepare for outside as mums"

"this course it's amazing, I don't want it to end"

"it has made me feel empowered, confident, resilient"

"I feel good and better within myself; I really appreciate the opportunity to discover myself again- it helped me cope"

"this course has given me purpose; it motivates me to be a better mum"

I enjoyed the group so much, I got so much from the course and the other mothers"

"this is safe place to share your emotions and learn how to manage them- it made me an emotionally stronger mother"

"I've gained personal strength; I understand myself and others more"

"I now have confidence, self-esteem, I'm a better mum"

" I am not alone"