

## **Poverty and disadvantage among prisoners' families**



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# **Poverty and disadvantage among prisoners' families**

**Rose Smith, Roger Grimshaw, Renee Romeo and Martin Knapp**



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Joseph Rowntree Foundation, The Homestead, 40 Water End, York YO30 6WP  
Website: [www.jrf.org.uk](http://www.jrf.org.uk)

### **About the authors**

Rose Smith (PhD) was a social researcher at the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, King's College, London.

Roger Grimshaw (PhD) is research director at the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, King's College, London.

Renee Romeo (MSc) undertakes mental health economic evaluations and economic research at the Centre for the Economics of Mental Health at the Institute of Psychiatry, King's College, London.

Martin Knapp is Professor of Social Policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science, and Professor of Health Economics at King's College, London, Institute of Psychiatry.

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# Executive summary

This study set out to explore the experiences of poverty and disadvantage among the family members and partners of prisoners living at or below the level officially recognised as ‘poor’.<sup>1</sup> How did imprisonment affect their financial, housing and social circumstances, and how did they respond? Imprisonment brings a multitude of challenges for families that face systematic impoverishment and disadvantage in the wake of a prison sentence. Families attempt to minimise expenditure but debts were accrued and standards of living fell. The capacity of services specifically targeted for prisoners’ families to address long-term and widespread poverty and disadvantage was found to be limited in various ways.

Families were vulnerable to financial instability, poverty and debt: household incomes fell as the prisoners’ income was lost; those who cared for prisoners’ children left paid work; and damaging financial transitions caused further disruption. Meanwhile financial outgoings increased as families paid a proportion, or in some cases all, of the costs of prison visiting and sent the prisoner cash for essential items, together with existing or new clothes and electrical goods, in accordance with prison security regulations. Reliance on state benefits was at the root of the poverty found within prisoners’ families, or, in the case of foreign national families, limited recourse to public funds. Older people with caring responsibilities and those with disabilities were particularly likely to suffer from entrenched poverty. Ethnicity and nationality also influence the likelihood of remaining poor.

Following the imprisonment, prisoners’ children were cared for predominantly by women, either partners or extended family, often in lone-parent families. Decisions among women caring for prisoners’ children about paid work conformed to a recognised logic in prioritising the welfare of the children over and above economic gain.

The several disadvantages associated with imprisonment included: housing disruption; high rates of depression (89 per cent in this adult sample); physical illness among adults and children; and permanent loss of a parent through deportation of foreign national prisoners. The pressures borne by families throughout a term of imprisonment had a destabilising or fragmentary impact on relationships, with negative implications for reunion after release.

The available funding sources for services carry tensions and uncertainties, which are not conducive to provision or development of services. The one statutory service is constrained in its scope and lacks information about its potential target group;



voluntary organisations are constrained by inadequate benefit levels and, in the case of foreign nationals, lack of recourse to public funds. The stigma attached to imprisonment extends to charitable organisations' willingness to fund work with this group and the resulting lack of funding impacts on service capacity and professionalism. Strategies adopted to overcome funding difficulties result in further vulnerabilities and potential distortions to services, such as services becoming target driven or removed from communities.

Imprisonment carries costs to families and the wider society, some of which were estimated by a close examination of a subsample. The full cost per family over six months, including the cost to agencies and the cost of support provided by family and relatives, was estimated at an average of £5,860. The total cost of imprisonment to agencies over a six-month period as a direct result of imprisonment of the family member averaged £4,810 per family, 51 per cent of which was borne by social services. The estimated total cost of imprisonment would rise by 31 per cent if these costs to the family and wider society were added to prison service costs.

The costs of services to meet poverty and disadvantage were estimated and the results were indicative. For example, families were able to save £27 towards the cost of visits to see loved ones, in addition to the saving in childminding costs through provision of supervised play during visiting. A telephone advice service cost between £6 and £9 per hour, while advice from a generalist worker cost £17 per hour and from a specialist advice worker £20 per hour. A befriending service with ongoing support cost £177 per family and comprehensive ongoing family support cost £914 per person. These costs represent the ability of services to enable families to function financially, socially and emotionally during and after the crisis of imprisonment.

The disruption to family incomes, housing, health and relationships raises question marks with respect to policy that focuses on the family as a resettlement tool.

Criminal justice and social welfare policy combine to impoverish and disadvantage, and exclude, the relatives of those in prison – in particular prisoners' children. Reducing child poverty in general is a major target of policy. However, given the impact of imprisonment on family incomes, children of prisoners must form a key part of that wider group at risk of poverty. Caring responsibilities in this context are a factor shaping employment decisions, though welfare policy assumes that employment-related decision making will be economically rational. To the extent that a welfare-to-work policy is seen as one means of reducing child poverty, this policy tool is unlikely to be effective in relation to impoverished prisoners' families.

The report concludes that a clarification and review of the consequences of criminal justice policy for families appears to be necessary. Four fundamental themes are suggested for attention: rights and equality; care principles; public accounts reform; and community-based services, which would form the basis of an alternative political settlement.

# 1 The need to understand poverty and disadvantage among prisoners' families

## Introduction: prisoners' families – an urgent question?

Britain is now the prison capital of Europe, sending more people to prison than any major European country, measured by head of population. While the premise of criminal justice policy is to punish the offender, as this report will show, the effect of the criminal justice system as it currently operates, and in conjunction with other branches of social policy, is a significant economic punishment for the family.

At the time of writing, there are 78,085 men and women in prison in the UK (HM Prison Service, 2006). The courts have increased the use of custody and the length of prison sentences for both male and female offenders, although there has not been a corresponding increase in crime (Hough *et al.*, 2003). As a consequence of the sentencing reforms in the Criminal Justice Act 2003, this trend is likely to accelerate, both generally (Hough *et al.*, 2003) and in relation to women (Player, 2003) and black and minority ethnic groups, whose presence in the prison population grew in the decade to 2002 by 124 per cent, while overall the prison population grew by 55 per cent (Hearnden and Hough, 2004). Twenty per cent of female prisoners are foreign nationals (CWCJS, 2004, p. 5).

Prisoners are drawn from the most socially deprived sections of society (Houchin, 2005). By implication, sentencing trends suggest a concentration of impact in particular areas. At the individual level, Houchin (2005) concludes that the effect of increasing severity and duration of punishments will be a tendency to increase social exclusion. However, part of the problem in developing an understanding of the issues concerning the families of prisoners to date has been the view of 'offenders' as individuals, stripped of all social relations:

The isolated offender is a useful fiction ... but a fiction that has come to so thoroughly dominate our analysis of what our criminal law should and can do that we are blind to its limitations.  
(Braman, 2004, p. 63)

Separation from all social life is implicit in the concept of imprisonment. Accordingly, ever larger numbers of children, in particular children from minority ethnic groups, will be separated from their parents. The social ramifications of criminal justice policy

remain almost uncharted territory. Research is therefore urgently needed into the 'collateral' impacts of imprisonment.

This study set out to discover how the lives of prisoners' families' – in particular in relation to poverty and disadvantage – have been shaped by imprisonment of a family member. This topic requires appreciation of current and historically defined social policy, which overlaps and intersects in the context of imprisonment to present families with challenges in the face of which 'choice' of action is an unenviable compromise. The available literature concerning prisoners' families strengthens the need for more detailed policy analysis in relation to this group. We then go on to describe the study aims and methods.

### **The social policy context of imprisonment and international perspectives**

There are indications that the difficulties facing the families of prisoners remain multiple and complex (SEU, 2002, pp. 116–17). In the United States, studies of mass imprisonment have explored the implications of wider social policy for African-American families (Braman, 2004). Evidence is emerging about increased financial hardship among those caring for prisoners' children and supporting the prisoner, and about how imprisonment both creates and entrenches existing poverty (Braman, 2002). Decline in family income following imprisonment has been linked to the underestimated loss of both male and female prisoners' contributions to the family economy (Sharp and Marcus-Mendoza, 2001) as well as the likelihood of female carers leaving paid employment following a relative's imprisonment (Arditti *et al.*, 2003).

There is less clarity concerning these contextual and relational issues outside the United States. In Britain, research has remained focused on families in relation to penal and criminal justice issues, and the prison (Fishman, 1990). Some studies have detailed financial problems faced by prisoners' families and recorded their distress, in particular that of women (Morris, 1965) and children of prisoners (Gabel and Johnston, 1995). Appreciation has been shown of the gendered nature of caring in relation to imprisonment (Aungles, 1994; Codd, 2002). There is, therefore, a body of evidence concerned with the conditions of families living with the consequences of imprisonment, but the findings are scattered. Moreover, listing the problems that prisoners' families face does not reach down to the roots of the processes that produce and sustain them. In this study we relate the experiences of prisoners' families to the broader social policy context that shapes their household economies, social lives and futures. Approaching the analysis of poverty and disadvantage in

this way allows explanations of the disruption caused by imprisonment to emerge. These show the nature of the experience in relation to structural difference (gender, age, ethnicity, disability and socio-economic group), enabling understanding through reference to theoretical and policy-related material.

## **Aims and objectives**

The aims of the project were to:

- explore the relationship between the home and imprisonment, and the economic, social and emotional consequences for prisoners' families
- increase understanding of the way in which social processes and practices are related to the experience of poverty and disadvantage
- identify a range of current approaches to addressing these issues
- assess these in terms of the experience of key target groups and the benefits that could accrue from promising schemes
- draw out relevant policy implications.

Our key objectives were to:

- interview a diverse group of prisoners' families who were living in poverty
- focus on families' perceptions of their experiences and their attempts to influence their circumstances
- enhance understanding of how social policy and practice relates to the experience of imprisonment
- specifically examine how the families' experiences of poverty and imprisonment relate to social welfare and criminal justice policy
- identify effective and appropriate services offered specifically to families of prisoners, and to examine how the services function to address the difficulties faced by the families

- assess the cost of current service provision and the cost of imprisonment to individual families.

These aims clearly demanded an understanding of how key terms – families, poverty and disadvantage – are used in social policy contexts and how these meanings are subject to diverse interpretations.

### **Key terms: definitions of the ‘family’ and ‘welfare’**

‘The family’, as a singular term, is an ideological construct (Williams, 2004). In the post-war period the ‘normative’ family consisted of the heterosexual male breadwinner household, which has been central to welfare policy (Williams, 2004). In *Supporting Families* (Home Office, 1998, p. 4), New Labour confirmed its commitment to the heterosexual two-adult household as the form most likely to offer stability and responsible parenthood, although, recently, it has recognised the increasing diversity of family forms, for example, through the Civil Partnerships Act (2004).

Two points need to be made here. First, welfare policy – ‘welfare to work’ – is closely linked with the family based on a household composed of two adults. Williams (2004, p. 39) suggests ‘its embrace is ambivalent in relation to lone parents, families with a disabled member, co-habitees and minority ethnic families’. Second, ‘welfare to work’ is underpinned by the assumption that people’s employment-related decisions will prioritise maximising their household income. The principle underlying this policy framework has been referred to as the work ethic:

At the centre of New Labour’s welfare reforms is the attempt to ‘make work pay’, that is to use encouragement into the labour market as a way to tackle poverty, to provide support for lone parents and their children ... The ethic of work provides the financial rationale to get people ‘off welfare and into work’.  
(Williams, 2004, p. 28)

Social policy has therefore moved away from a ‘male breadwinner’ model of the family towards a ‘two adult worker family’, and a benefit structure in which workless households are at risk of poverty (Darton *et al.*, 2003).

In this report ‘the family’ embraces a range of diverse living arrangements. These include: women and men who co-habit; non-co-habiting ‘partners’; individuals who are divorced or separated but who continue to co-parent children; parents and

grandparents with/out relationships and/or children. No members of same-sex households were identified in the research.

### **‘Poverty’ and ‘the poor’**

A recognised definition of poverty in Britain is to have a household income at 60 per cent or below the median income after housing costs (Piachaud, 2005, p. 6). In 2004/05, 16 per cent of the population lived in households with below 60 per cent of the median income (DWP, 2006a). However, this measure is based on an entire society, whereas poverty is unevenly distributed across and within social groups according to age, gender, ethnic group and disability (DWP, 2006a). The term ‘poverty’, however, implies more than income; it refers to impoverishment of access to a range of material resources, and thus social deprivation (Houchin, 2005, p. 7), or ‘disadvantage’, discussed further below.

The welfare state at its inception was understood to guarantee a minimum standard of health and financial welfare for all citizens. It was structured to serve a population categorised into particular subgroups, e.g. the ‘elderly’, ‘working women’ and people whom we now group under the broad heading of the ‘disabled’. Assumptions about the roles, responsibilities and needs associated with these categories are imbued with meanings about their relative social, cultural and moral value (Lewis, 1998a). For instance, the legitimacy and morality of a benefit for lone-parent households was questioned in the 1990s and the lone-parent premium was removed in the Social Security Act of 1988.

Access to the welfare state has shaped the distribution of poverty. Questions of what, how and to whom welfare services and benefits would be delivered resulted in marginalisation and exclusion of some groups (Lewis, 1998a; Lewis, 1998b). Immigration and nationality laws and rules were introduced, which prohibit or restrict access of non-British passport holders and foreign nationals to state resources, including housing, health and financial assistance (Appendix 8).

Since 1997, welfare reform has been designed to encourage people into paid work as a means of reducing poverty. New Labour has argued that moving from ‘welfare to work’ is the route out of poverty and social exclusion. The New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) is a labour market programme for lone parents claiming Income Support. It aims to improve lone parents’ prospects and living standards by providing advice and information about work-related issues, help with job searching, information about the financial consequences of working and help with childcare (Evans *et al.*, 2003), together with financial incentives to take work, such as in-work benefits (see Table 2



in Chapter 2) and more childcare places (Gray, 2001). The New Deal is presented as a 'voluntary programme', because lone parents at least of children under 16 are not yet obliged to seek employment. This situation may change (Gray, 2001).

Participation in the New Deal is voluntary; nevertheless, welfare benefits for workless families and adults remain low (Middleton, 2005, p. 24). Many end up with incomes close to or below the poverty level (Piachaud, 2005, p. 10).

Worklessness is not unemployment (although it does cover this): it refers to those without a job either because they do not have one, or they are available for work and are looking (unemployment) or they are simply unable to work, either due to incapacity or caring responsibilities.  
(Dornan, 2005, p. 34)

Worklessness is associated with factors known to impact on rates of labour market participation, such as age, physical or learning disabilities, diagnosed mental health problems or caring responsibilities. Analyses of unemployment and low pay among black and minority ethnic populations recognise structural discrimination (Craig, 2005). The employment status of adults who care for children is related to child poverty (Middleton, 2005, p. 24). Ninety per cent of workless families with children are poor (Darton *et al.*, 2003), which is only partially explained by joblessness in lone-parent households (Piachaud, 2005), low pay and insecure work also being relevant.

Nonetheless, worklessness among lone-parent families is particularly relevant in relation to child poverty (Piachaud, 2005, p. 16). Indeed, the Government has identified work as the best route out of poverty for families including lone parents (HM Treasury, 2004b, p. 19) and paid work is fundamental to its strategy to eradicate child poverty. One policy objective is for 70 per cent of lone parents to enter paid work by 2010, enabled through advice provided by the New Deal for Lone Parents. The estimated employment rate for lone parents is 55.5 per cent (Labour Force Survey, 2006), a rate that has risen by 1.5 per cent since 2003.<sup>1</sup> This is the case despite a generally buoyant employment context (Piachaud, 2005). More significantly, if the overall policy were to be successful, lone parents eligible for the scheme in the future would be increasingly the 'hardest to help' people with 'very serious and multiple barriers to work' (Evans *et al.*, 2003, p. 103).

Paid work at present remains the only officially favoured route out of poverty. Removal of the lone-parent premium in 1998 demonstrates that the emphasis on paid work as the route out of poverty extends to lone parents. Despite reductions in poverty through new benefits and tax credits, increases in existing benefits and



other measures to tackle poverty, of all lone-parent families, 48 per cent currently live below the poverty line, the highest rate in the EU (Piachaud, 2005).

Parental disability is also a key indicator of child poverty. Although households with one disabled parent or carer are more likely to receive the higher rate Incapacity Benefits than the lower rate Job Seeker's Allowance (Appendix 5), the longer-term nature of Incapacity Benefits implies that these children will experience more prolonged periods of poverty (Stickland and Olsen, 2005).

Imprisonment is also a recognised factor in child poverty. It removes a potential adult worker from a two-adult household, leaving a lone head of household – usually female (Mumola, 2000). Alternatively a lone parent might be imprisoned, in which case a grandmother is a likely substitute carer. For these families, welfare policies have critical implications for staying in and moving out of poverty.

The Government's 2004 *Child Poverty Review* states that:

Having a parent in prison can have a particularly detrimental impact on children. Every year approximately 150,000 children have a parent who enters prison. Sources of income and accommodation can be lost, and benefit entitlements may alter, exposing the family to poverty.  
(HM Treasury, 2004b, p. 76)

Following a restructuring based on a rhetoric that idealised independence and employment as a solution to poverty, the welfare state does not prevent poverty among workless households and non-British citizens. Moreover, poverty is linked with various dimensions of disadvantage, explored below.

### **Definitions of disadvantage**

Poor health and poor housing (temporary, overcrowded accommodation) (Darton *et al.*, 2003, p. 36) are dimensions of disadvantage that hit the least affluent the hardest (New Policy Institute, 2005). Ethnicity and disadvantage are related but the relationship is often misunderstood. Poor housing and employment positions found among black and minority ethnic groups are often viewed as a consequence of individual prejudice rather than 'indirect' discrimination, 'that is, where a universal practice puts a particular group at a disadvantage' (Williams, 1989, p. 91).

In the context of the criminal justice system, prisoners who do not hold a British passport – usually known as 'foreign nationals' – are disadvantaged through the

additional sentence of deportation (Sentencing Advisory Panel, 2005), referred to in France as *La double peine* (the double sentence). Thus disadvantage is associated with poverty, but there are non-economic, historically rooted factors that produce and maintain a picture of disadvantage that is not uniform, albeit within predominantly low-income groups. Legislation and policy are important in structuring or dismantling disadvantage throughout the population, in terms of the assumptions they make about both family life and ethnicity and the resources they provide for their well-being (Williams, 2004, p. 26).

### Research methods

In-depth interviews were conducted with 41 family members or partners of 41 prisoners. Because prisoners' families are a hard-to-reach group, the strategy for contacting them was flexible. The key criterion for inclusion in the study was a household income at or below 60 per cent of the mean equivalised, that is, 60 per cent of the average, adjusted for household size (Appendix 1). The household was therefore 'poor' at the time of interview.<sup>2</sup> A short questionnaire was also given to interviewees for completion, to collect data on aspects of poverty and disadvantage (Appendix 2). In the case of telephone interviewees, the questionnaire was posted to them prior to interview, with an SAE. One respondent who was interviewed through an interpreter received language support to complete the questionnaire.

Interviewees were recruited through three routes.

- Visitors were approached by a researcher (at one prison, two researchers) who invited them to participate at three prison Visitor Centres in the South of England. The prisons included one local prison, one training prison and a women's prison.
- Leaflets and posters written in English were distributed to Visitor Centres nationally. These described the study and invited family members to participate.
- Three voluntary sector organisations were selected for their geographical spread and the ethnicity of the client groups. They were located in the Northern, Central and South Eastern regions of Britain. Two were specifically family support organisations and one was a broader organisation within which prisoners' families were one group that received support as part of a prisoner support project.

### Box 1 Summary of interviewee characteristics\*

- Male: 4; female: 37.
- White British/other: 30.
- Minority ethnic group: 11.
- Age:
  - 18–30 years: 9
  - 31–40 years: 13
  - 41–50 years: 6
  - 51–60 years: 13.
- Self-reported disability: 19 (excluding 'depression').
- Self-reported depression (General Health Questionnaire\*\*): 25 (89 per cent of 28 respondents).
- Relationship to prisoner:
  - partners: 26 (18 not married, 8 married)
  - mothers: 12
  - fathers: 2
  - adult children: 1.
- Children: 64 biological and non-biological children of, or being parented by, prisoners.
- Incomes: 30 'poor'\*; two non-poor (housing and/or employment threatened).
- Housing\*\*\*: majority rented; 11 interviewees lacked space and seven suffered damp.
- Relatives in prison\*\*\*\*:
  - 20 serving sentences over five years
  - of all prisoners, 20 had served 12 months or less
  - 16 were from minority ethnic groups.

\* Implications of the sample and method of recruitment are discussed in Appendix 4.

\*\* Within the self-completed questionnaire, depression was measured using the General Health Questionnaire (Appendix 2). The cases of non-respondents were checked for any systematic difference. There was nothing to mark them out in relation to sentence length, recidivism or method of recruitment.

\*\*\* Some form of problem with housing was reported by 34 questionnaire respondents.

\*\*\*\* Thirty-nine of 41 sentenced.

### Interviews with family members

Of the 41 interviewees, nine were recruited by a researcher at Visitor Centres, 15 were recruited through voluntary organisations and the remaining 17 through information at Visitor Centres. At some Visitor Centres, staff encouraged participation. Interviews were conducted in private at Visitor Centres (four); at the home of the family member or at a convenient location, such as a cafe (16); at support organisation premises (nine); or, if the interviewee preferred, over the telephone (12). Women with young children or daytime employment tended to prefer this method.

Where generalisations are made in the text concerning families, a minimum of five interviews have provided evidence to substantiate the point.

The impact of imprisonment on household and family structure is summarised in Table 1 (in Chapter 2). The majority of interviewees were partners of prisoners. Nine of the 26 partners did not live together immediately prior to the imprisonment, although they had done for a period of three months or more in the recent past, and are hereafter referred to as 'non-resident partners'.

### The prisoners

Each interviewee was asked to talk about one prisoner, though six had more than one family member in prison if extended family was included. Thirty-six prisoners were men and five were women, reflecting the current ratio of male to female prisoners nationally. Sixteen prisoners were known to be from minority ethnic groups (including three of the five women).

This was the first custodial sentence for half of the 38 prisoners for whom we have information regarding imprisonment history. Seven (18 per cent) had served more than five custodial sentences and the remainder had served five sentences or less.

Although a relatively high proportion of prisoners were serving sentences of over five years in comparison to the prison population as a whole (Prison Reform Trust, 2004), the long-term effect would not have been felt because half of the prisoners had served 12 months or less. Prisoners serving longer sentences tend to be held further from home, but prisoners serving shorter sentences may be moved from local jails given the current overcrowding. In addition, given the trends in sentencing (Hough *et al.*, 2003), a greater proportion of families may be dealing increasingly with longer sentences in the future.

In total, prisoners from minority ethnic groups (including those of African-Caribbean heritage and those of mixed or non-British heritage) were represented in the study in proportionately greater numbers than they are represented in the population as a whole, but in proportionately fewer numbers than are present in the current prison population. Given their increasing over-representation in the latter, these groups deserve a central place in our analysis and discussion. Some groups equally deserving of attention, including gypsies and travellers, families of asylum seekers and refugees and foreign nationals, were not included in the interview sample because of problems of recruitment together with their reluctance to participate. For instance, one older man of South Asian origin said 'I'll talk to you when he comes out'. Other families of foreign nationals talked of their experiences, but declined a formal interview. However, research was conducted among specialist support organisations to improve understanding of common problems related to nationality and/or ethnicity in accessing state welfare.

### **Interview analysis**

The 41 interviews were fully transcribed and analysed using a qualitative data analysis package, QSR N6. The interviews were searched for specific data relevant to poverty (employment, income, expenditure, welfare benefits, etc.) and disadvantage (housing, health, children, stigma, support, etc.). Data about the respondents and their prisoner relatives were linked to the analysis of interview contents. During the course of the analysis, new themes concerned with employment-related decisions and care for prisoners' children emerged. The themes were further developed through comparison with recently emerging and theoretically informed studies of poor families. The analysis examined these themes in relation to both the stories as told by prisoners' families and the contemporary policy context.

### **Cost methodology (Chapter 2)**

Within the interviews lay information that would throw light on direct costs to agencies (public services) and indirect costs – that is, those less explicit costs to society of the imprisonment, such as lost earnings. Interviewees were not asked specifically about this aspect of their experience but we have been able to compile some estimates of a broad range of imprisonment costs.

A sample of five cases was selected on the basis of: variation in age; ethnicity; family structure before and after imprisonment; level of service use; and employment history and status (see page 41).

Health and social services were used by most of the five cases and were costed over a period of six months, since this was the maximum period over which data were common to all cases, at 2004/05 price levels. Publicly available cost estimates and those provided by the families themselves over the course of the study were used. Some of the publicly available unit cost estimates were taken from a national compendium of unit costs produced annually (Curtis and Netten, 2005), and others were taken from a range of sources detailed in tables to follow. We include only the cost to agencies and families because of the imprisonment and did not estimate any longer-term costs to society. The costs to the family and relatives are somewhat unsophisticated because the study was not designed to elicit these estimates, and the monetary values attached were obtained from estimates made by interviewees and a variety of sources detailed elsewhere in the report. However, we believe that this does not detract from the results.

The costs of lost earnings, the inability to work outside the home, in so far as this could be reasonably linked to the imprisonment, were based on the best estimate of the gross median wage of all employees in the UK (Office of National Statistics, 2004a).

### **The survey of services (Chapter 3)**

The services included were identified through a national consultation exercise (Appendices 6 and 7) and are profiled below. No statutory services that focus entirely on prisoners' families could be identified. While one that receives funding from a statutory source operates on a national basis, the others work in various ways in local communities or incorporate a regional dimension by staffing a helpline. Where possible, management, staff and service users were interviewed. If service users were not available, information was extracted from in-depth interviews in which interviewees had mentioned relevant services by name. (Multiple sources are numbered, e.g. User 2.) Unfortunately no volunteers were available for interview.

Information concerning management and funding, service provision, and how delivery is achieved was sought (Box 2 and Table 6). Detailed financial information regarding any of the services is presented in the economic evaluation.

## **Structure of the report**

The report is divided into four substantive chapters. Chapter 2 describes the economic impact of imprisonment and employment-related disadvantage, in relation to the contextual framework outlined above. This approach makes apparent the significance of interrelated policies to families' experiences. The chapter includes an estimate of the actual costs of imprisonment for families and the wider costs to society; Chapter 3 comprises a survey and economic evaluation of five services that were considered to undertake interesting and effective work with prisoners' families; and Chapter 4 draws together the findings and their relevance to the importance of policy as a way of understanding the plight of families and the context in which they try to reconstruct their lives. The chapter concludes by looking at the wide-ranging policy implications of the research and comments on how we might overcome the policy dilemma.

## **2 Bearing the costs of imprisonment**

### **Introduction**

This chapter reports the findings of our study of families. In the first section we examine households prior to the imprisonment and the reasons for pre-imprisonment poverty. The next section, 'The financial impact of imprisonment', looks at three major ways in which imprisonment reduces household income. We then move on to discuss, in 'Surviving the sentence', how families described living with, and adapting to, the reduction in income, together with the ongoing costs of the imprisonment. The following section, 'Staying poor and getting poorer', looks at the basis on which employment-related decisions are made by carers in relation to welfare and criminal justice policy frameworks. We then move on to examine disadvantage associated with imprisonment including: housing disruptions; the social, psychological and health impacts of imprisonment for adults and children affected by the separation, and children's responses; the nature and location of stigma; the potential effects of deportation; the impact of imprisonment for family relationships and the implications for resettlement policy. In the final section, we have used our interview data to assess 'The economic impact of imprisonment for families and wider social costs'. Five families were selected for inclusion (see Chapter 1) and the analysis provides costs that are illustrative of the range of costs to agencies and families that might result from imprisonment.

### **Family life and costs of imprisonment**

#### **Household structure and functioning, prior to the imprisonment**

The family forms found among participants in this study were diverse (see Table 1), as in the wider population (Williams, 2004). Of the 26 partners and spouses of prisoners (referred to hereafter collectively as 'partners'), nine were not living together at the time of arrest. Four non-resident partners contributed financially or in kind, e.g. house repairs. Three of the non-resident partners were co-parenting biological or informally adopted children and two had contributed financially. This had helped to insulate households from poverty.



**Table 1 The impact of imprisonment on household structure**

Household type	Numbers of households	Pre-imprisonment household structure	Post-imprisonment household structure
1	13	2 adults (co-resident partners) and 1 or more child(ren)	13 female-headed, lone-parent households
2	6	6 female-headed, lone-parent households	6 female-headed, lone-parent households
3	5	5 lone grandmothers (3 caring for total of 4 children)	5 lone grandmother carers for 9 children. The 5 additional children were of 3 lone female prisoners and 2 adult prisoners.
4	5	2 adults (co-resident partners, no child[ren])	1 adult partner
5	5	Female-headed, lone-parent households (prisoners' partners) with children	5 no change (though no financial or care support from partner)
6	2	2 grandparents	2 grandparents/carers
7	1	2 co-resident adults and children	1 adult in care home, children in foster care
8	4	Other (3 female-headed households; 1 lone grandmother)	1 house move, 1 loss of home, 2 no change

### *Challenges to family relationships*

For more than half the families it was the first time their relative or partner had been imprisoned.<sup>1</sup> Prior to imprisonment, living arrangements were mixed; some partners were co-habiting (or 'resident') and some were non-resident. Different living arrangements were not associated with instability. In the section concerned with 'Surviving the sentence', we look at the impact on family relationships as imprisonment reaches into their lives through the financial and caring demands that it places on direct and extended family. To understand the change in circumstances post-imprisonment, a brief look at the pre-existing financial conditions is helpful.

### **Work and financial circumstances pre-imprisonment**

Just under half of the interviewees' households were workless prior to imprisonment. It is likely – though it was not always possible to confirm employment status, given the link between welfare benefit levels, worklessness and poverty (Piachaud, 2005; see also Appendix 5 of this report) – that many of these households were poor. However they were apparently financially stable.

Pre-imprisonment worklessness was spread among households of prisoners' parents, co-habiting and non-resident prisoners' partners with children and those interviewees who were either carers for children or for whom – in two cases – the prisoner was their carer. Worklessness was also present among those subsequently imprisoned. Where the prisoner had served a previous custodial sentence, there was little evidence they had obtained sustainable employment. Though systematic and accurate information concerning pre-imprisonment income was difficult to obtain, there was evidence of poverty preceding imprisonment in long-term workless households where, in particular, one adult was older and had a physical disability or mental health problem.

Eligibility for welfare benefits is also related to the nationality test (Appendix 8). One interviewee's husband and full-time carer was a foreign national and as such was not entitled to claim from public funds, despite his role as carer for the interviewee and children. This case raises the question of how this family would have fared had it been the mother, the sole benefit claimant, who had been imprisoned.

Households with a pre-imprisonment income above the poverty threshold comprised one or more economically active individuals. These household structures were varied, including households comprising two adults and children, lone mothers and single-person households. The difference in standard of living between workless households and those where an adult had been in work pre-imprisonment was obvious on entering their homes. The social housing in which three long-term benefit claimants lived was sparsely furnished and uncarpeted, and located in areas where high levels of disadvantage were prevalent, and another two were overcrowded. The privately rented or social housing in which previously employed families lived contained furnishings and consumer items absent from homes of their workless counterparts. Occupations included skilled and unskilled work. Incomes were as high as £600 per week (probably gross) and, lower down the income scale, in-work benefits had been claimed by both two-adult and lone-parent households (Appendix 5).

## **The financial impact of imprisonment**

### **A fall in income**

In a self-completed questionnaire, 14 interviewees reported a change in income of less than £100 per month and 13 reported a change of over £100 per month. The change in income must have been a reduction because no interviewees discussed improved financial well-being. Job loss and benefit disruption were the commonest

reasons specified for income change. There were three key ways the imprisonment of a family member disrupted the often fragile economic circumstances of immediate and wider family.

*Loss of the prisoner's former contribution*

In households where the prisoner had previously been in paid employment, incomes fell by between £150 and £500 per week. The families apply for state welfare benefits as a replacement income and, unless they are in receipt of Child Tax Credit or Family Tax Credit, they live at or below 60 per cent of the median income:

When *[my husband]* first went to prison, before ... the doctor advised me to apply for the benefits, I only received £77 a week and we literally starved.  
(Jayne)<sup>2</sup>

The financial implications potentially create housing crises. This threat to housing is discussed below under the section entitled 'Disadvantage among families of prisoners'.

Imprisoned non-resident partners had also contributed to their partners' households, both directly and indirectly:

... going back to school they always had like new shoes and Daddy would buy 'em and ... as soon as the bills came in they'd be paid. Some weeks he'd leave whatever he had to pay ... if the phone bill came he'd say 'What are you going to do with the kids if you ain't got no phone?' He was good like that.  
(Patricia)

Non-resident (and resident) fathers had also provided unpaid caring time and had undertaken household repairs.

In families that had been financially secure prior to the imprisonment, income loss threatened assets. Privately owned homes cannot be serviced on low incomes. Linda's weekly income dropped from approximately £320 a week to £64.23. At the time of interview she received £76.00:

... my *[partner]* ... went to work ... there was always money there ...  
*[post-imprisonment]* All the bills are coming in ... I think the first big bill ...

was the water – £190 so I just threw it out the back and then ... the telly licence. And then there was no money left in the bank. It'd all gone ... I went out and got myself payment cards ... There's never much money left.

(Linda)

### *Exit from paid work*

A second cause of income reduction is the exit from paid work to care for children of the prisoner, among both primary- and second-wage earners. This applied both to partners and mothers of prisoners/grandmothers. Paid work – be it part-time or full-time – was found to be incompatible with caring for younger children:

I was doing a cleaning job ... [*in the*] evenings. So I had to give that up because he wasn't here to have the kids.

(Amy)

Exit from paid employment or a reduction in hours was consistent among three of the five women interviewed who were of African-Caribbean heritage. There are high rates of labour market participation among this group (Shields and Wheatley Price, 2003). It might be anticipated, therefore, that they would have remained in paid work. However, one British woman of African-Caribbean descent, a lone parent who had been in full-time work, was dismissed after taking on responsibility for two grandchildren following her (older) daughter's imprisonment. Though childcare was the main reason for leaving paid work during this period, two women without children also left paid employment because of the disruption and distress caused by the criminal justice process.

### *Benefit transitions*

The transition to benefit incomes or changes in benefit incomes is a vulnerable time. The time taken for new benefit claims to be processed, or for existing claims to be altered, sometimes involving processing errors, was a cause of income disruption. The period without any income ranged from one to 12 weeks. Financial support from family members was crucial during this period, but the extended family was not always in a position to prevent debt or rent arrears accruing. Extended families were usually unable to give money and, in the majority of cases, financial donations had to be repaid.

The following section examines how and why the families' financial situation and relationships develop, and what it means to live with poverty.

## **Surviving the sentence**

This section examines the ways in which families live with and adapt to the poverty and disadvantage imposed through imprisonment. It looks at their employment patterns, the values underlying their decisions in relation to paid work and asks why – given the policy emphasis on employment being a route out of poverty, in particular for lone parents – families remain poor during the imprisonment.

## **Subsidising the imprisonment**

At least half the interviewees described an increase in their outgoings, *along with* the problems of income reduction. Others described increases in their outgoings, though their incomes had not changed. Prisoners' families subsidise the prisoner in a number of ways (Hairston, 2003). Families in this study described the new financial outgoings associated with imprisonment. These included sending cash (£10–40 per month) to the prisoner in the form of postal orders for basic toiletries, writing materials and phone cards (Fishman, 1990). Phone calls from prisons are charged at eleven pence per minute (Hansard, 4 May 2006). Prisoners were charged five times higher than the standard payphone rate, during 2006<sup>3</sup> (Action for Prisoners' Families, 2005<sup>4</sup>).

Where regulations allowed, families sent in, or paid for, new clothing, electronic items and newspapers. Some, usually Category A (higher security) prisons, place restrictions on prisoners' existing property being brought to the prison. Usually, clothing and electronic goods must be posted to the prison or purchased new from catalogues, preventing families from purchasing items from cheaper sources such as markets or secondhand (see Table 4 later in this chapter for estimates of these costs to families).

## **Increase in other outgoings**

Visiting the prisoner forms a significant part of the financial challenge that prisoners' families face, added to which are the costs of phone calls to the prison to book visits. Families in receipt of means-tested benefits are eligible to claim travel and subsistence costs for two visits per month from the Assisted Prison Visits Unit

(APVU). Although the cost of public transport is fully reimbursed, the subsidies do not fully cover the cost of all forms of travel, accommodation or subsistence. Additional costs of underfunded visits varied among participants in this study, from less than £10 to £100 per month.

Unfunded visits presented a greater problem (see Table 4 later in this chapter). Benefits officers do not receive training about the scheme. The problems that this presents in terms of access to the scheme, and in particular equality of access, are detailed in Chapter 3 (p. 56). Many prisoners can be allowed more than two visits per month, but the APVU is required to remain within the legislation that entitles prisoners to two visits per month.

Structural factors, such as learning or physical disability (Appendix 3), and increasing age, added to visiting costs. About a quarter of the participants in this study were in receipt of either Incapacity Benefit or lower rates of Disability Living Allowance, caring for eight children between them, although not all were carers. One woman, not eligible to claim visiting costs and living on savings, moved house in order to be nearer to the prison and to avoid high travel and accommodation costs. A parent with a learning difficulty incurred an extra £15 travel costs because of her disability. Learning difficulties also reduce the likelihood of families using the available appeals process to obtain a refund of additional travel costs incurred because of their disability. Prisoners' children may therefore not benefit from any additional disability income because disability adds to the cost of prison visiting.

Families of prisoners with known drug misuse problems may be vulnerable to requests for drugs or high-value items of electronic equipment or designer clothing used as currency within the prison. There was evidence in three interviews of pressure to supply money or specific items of high value. In another case, a family had been harassed for payment for drugs at their home. However, families of those who misuse drugs are aware of the possibility of a continuing habit:

I talked with his brother ... he said ... just give him his chance ... if he keeps pestering, then don't send it, because I'm worried about drugs.  
(Rita)

Families negotiate visiting and sending cash with the prisoner, but women in particular feel an obligation to care for their relatives in prison:

I just try and economise. I mean, there's weeks where I can't send the money ... it's voluntary that I send it to him, and he understands ... I say, look, I can't send it this week, and he gets quite worried that I've got no

money ... sometimes I try to say to the other kids 'Could you send Dad some money in because I've got nothing?' ... and sometimes they do, sometimes they don't, but then I suppose they've all got their families ... [1] feel responsible, yes.

(Tracey)

The direct costs of supporting an individual in prison can, in spite of a contribution from the prison service towards travel costs, weigh heavily among families who have little flexibility in incomes from state welfare benefits.

### **Lack of protective factors**

There appeared to be few factors that protected families from the costs of supporting the prisoner in prison. Neither household structure nor pre-imprisonment employment status insulated against the increased outgoings that imprisonment imposed. Taking the best scenario – single-person households where the individual was in paid employment throughout and had no childcare responsibilities – the event was still profoundly damaging. For two prisoners' partners, who had not been resident with the prisoner and who remained in paid work, increased outgoings either threatened assets or led to their loss. One mortgagee had been forced to sell her home and move to rented accommodation. She had 40 per cent (£4,000) of her original savings left as a result of financing the move and the cost of continued support for her partner in prison.

Rarely, families were insulated by well-off extended family. Another mortgagee, who had childcare responsibilities and who had suffered the loss of her partner's income, had received considerable financial support to bridge the nine-month gap before she became eligible for state support. Extended family support in this case (only one of two in the study able to make cash gifts) enabled the woman to maintain her home.

The more usual, very small financial loans that extended family could offer did not prevent financial hardship, but ameliorated immediate shortfalls in income and enabled purchase of items such as food and payment of utility bills. Community support was mentioned in passing in just three cases. It took the form of neighbours and friends offering small cash loans or support in kind (help with car repairs, childcare or food) and was, in all but one case, limited. Again cash loans were repayable, a reflection of the poverty in environments from which prisoners are drawn.



Further, some extended family members were unwilling or simply unable to support the prisoner, or support dwindled with the realisation of the ongoing nature of any commitment:

I wouldn't say he's had as much support this time round and I can't really blame 'em now. I see it different myself ... he had a lot of support the first time ... but the second time ... I just deal with it myself ... Maybe I feel a bit embarrassed, I don't know. As if to say it is my problem, that I'm not making it anybody else's ... I think I've done a lot of things differently ... I have to [*support him financially*] ... I send like £20 ... Twice a month and then sometimes I send him stamps ... but that's not very often cause he doesn't write very often.

(Ann)

The pressure on the one family member willing to support the prisoner was exacerbated. Where there was no financial contribution or the contribution was insufficient, the financial situation became particularly acute in the early stages of the imprisonment and, for workless lone-parent households, this situation was ongoing.

### **Minimising expenditure and managing debt**

This section explores what the additional outgoings discussed above meant to families at different stages in their lives, how they attempted to deal with their situation and the obstacles that lay in their way.

For those on incomes from welfare benefits, budgets are overstretched:

... out of my payment a week ... by the time I've paid off what I need to pay for [*my partner in prison*], which is like ... £20, I've got like £4 left myself for the week. So, I'm ending up borrowing money off my mum.

(Belinda)

There was little or no flexibility in their incomes to cut expenditure, in particular among families who were claiming benefits prior to the imprisonment, but standards of living still fell. One interviewee was asked how her food shopping had changed to accommodate the additional pressure on her benefit income:

I used to like fresh food ... like fresh meat ... I really do feel ashamed. I don't remember the last time I actually had fresh food for my fridge ...



It's all frozen ... I used to love cooking things like a stew but ... Meat's not very, um, cheap, you know.

(Diane)

Debt was accrued due to the pressure on inadequate incomes. Loans obtained through the Social Fund were mentioned twice. A more common means of obtaining credit was through store cards and private loan companies, which charge high rates of interest. Parents and carers drew attention to the increased financial pressure from resorting to loans or credit:

I've got a loan from ... a loan company, I had to borrow money just to supply *[my partner in prison]* ... But I have to borrow money from the Social *[Fund]* ... I have to pay them £5 a week. Sometimes I can't even pay them ... I've got to pay £10 the next time ... I borrowed £80 *[referring to a private loan company]* ... I have to pay them back an extra £60.

(Judy)

The proportion of income allocated to debt repayment may be substantial:

*[You]* take loans out and then when the people come round every week that's half your money gone ... I reckon I had near enough two grands' worth of debt ... With one of them *[the repayments]* would be £60 per week. It's a lot ... £60 a week is half the money I'm on at the moment.

(Pam)

There were mixed perceptions among the families of a system that imprisons the poorest and expects the family to provide for the prisoner's basic needs. An injustice was perceived:

... financially – we're punished as well ... if we don't pay *[the extra]* for the visit, then we don't see him ... we have to ... pay for ... the things he needs, who else is going to supply them for him? ... I think it's unfair ... rich famil*[ies]* ... they can afford to send £10 every week ... Whereas a family that hasn't got any money, £10 every week is a lot and it's coming out of the children's things, like if they're already on benefit ... Why do they have to have money sent in from outside?

(Nancy)

The financial impact of imprisonment for families has been discussed by Braman (2002, 2004) in the US context. He comments:

... costs [*of imprisonment*] bear down disproportionately on families that are least able to absorb them. The effects of incarceration are particularly devastating to these families because they have the highest marginal costs – that is, their above subsistence resources are already severely taxed, so any additional expenses or burdens are more keenly felt. (Braman, 2002, p. 122)

### Staying poor and getting poorer

There are many situations – separation, divorce or bereavement – in which families lose a breadwinner or family member, and must pick up the pieces and carry on. Prisoners' families face a separation and in many respects are ordinary families attempting to get over this blow. Their situation is distinguished by the ongoing 'caring' implications of the imprisonment, such as taking on the prisoners' children and the costs of supporting the prisoner. The distinction is not recognised in their relationship to the welfare state or the labour market.

This section examines what shapes a family's decision to continue to 'care' when this role places relatively vast financial and emotional pressures on them. It also asks, if these are just ordinary families attempting to adapt to the imprisonment (Braman, 2004), why do they not address their poverty in the medium to long term by (re-)entering paid employment? In the context of a government strategy that aims to lift children out of poverty through encouraging lone parents into paid employment, what is it that shapes the decisions of partners or carers on the outside in relation to paid work?

### Gender and employment-related decision making

Williams' (2004, p. 17) research found that, in making decisions about work and parenting, and when faced with dilemmas in this respect, people's decision making draws on 'values about care and commitment'. That is to say, women's caring activities 'are not simple obligations, but are negotiated according to what people think is the proper thing to do in the context that they are in', and that these commitments may extend across cultures and continents (Williams, 2004, p. 17). Duncan *et al.* (2003a) has referred to such decision making as 'gendered moral rationality':

*[People]* take decisions with reference to moral and socially negotiated (not individual) views about what behaviour is right and proper, and

this varies between particular social groups, neighbourhoods and welfare states ... when it comes to dependent children, there can be non-negotiable, and deeply gendered, moral requirements to take responsibility for children's needs and to place these first.

(Duncan *et al.*, 2003a, p. 310)

In the context of the imprisonment of a child's mother, grandmothers in particular prioritised the care and emotional needs of their grandchildren over and above their own or their grandchildren's economic well-being:

I've got some beans and spaghetti. And some flour, so I'll make some dumplings ... But I will be begging. Kids ain't got no breakfast ... but now I've got me nice big £3 in me pocket, it'll buy me a loaf of bread and some potatoes and some flour. I can't live like this for ever. It's tempting to put them in care you know. To think, oh fuck it why should I live like it? I ain't their mother. But I can't do that because it's a horrible thing to do. They might think I don't love 'em. I do love them, but ... sometimes I'm bitter  
*[chuckles]*.

(Josie)

Williams (2004) argues that decisions are not simply obligations but are negotiated according to the context they are in. Imprisonment is a very specific context in which the core of what is being negotiated when women enter prison is less about childcare options and more about whether to care for the prisoners' children or allow them to be taken into local authority care, with the involvement of social services that this would entail:

... my eldest daughter works ... My second daughter's got five children. My third daughter suffers with depression ... she's got one son ... and she couldn't manage the two of them ... So the option was ... me, or him being put in care, and I don't think ... I wouldn't have been able to live with that choice. It's not his fault.

(May)

Despite the financial implications, which included leaving paid work, women prioritised the needs of prisoners' children.

We looked for evidence of men's attitudes to care and employment. There were only two cases of men who were involved in the care of children – in both cases grandchildren. One combined employment and care of grandchildren, the other man was unable to work through disability. One man was mixed-race British, the other

was of South Asian origin. However, significantly, both men had a female partner. One talked about care of the grandchildren as a collective activity:

We had [*the children*] right from the beginning. We love having them.  
(Mohamad)

Asked about who cared mainly for the children, he replied:

The whole family help, because another member of the family lives here as well  
(Mohamad)

This grandfather's description suggests that women were involved in care for the children, though kinship networks and commitment to family were significant in deciding where the children should go. Men did feel a responsibility to the prisoners' children, but there was ultimately a reliance on shared care. This was reflected by the second man, whose grandchildren eventually became looked after by social services:

We didn't claim all [*the children's expenses*] we could do because we felt they are our grandchildren and we should buy them things. And we felt responsible for them ... We always knew they were going to go into care. Keeping them was simply not an option. And we were becoming the parents. We were losing that special relationship of a grandparent.  
(Bob)

This is not to say that men do not make considered decisions about childcare and employment in the face of a female partner's imprisonment. Our evidence shows, nonetheless, that it is predominantly women, alone, who take responsibility for prisoners' children to prevent their being taken into care and who weigh employment decisions carefully against the children's needs, prioritising the latter.

A further contextual dimension is employment. It might be anticipated that existing labour market attachment would influence the now lone parents of prisoners' children. However, a younger (21–30 years), middle-class woman, previously in paid work, similarly prioritised the needs of her child. Her negotiation, when interviewed, considered income as a priority but her child's needs were paramount:

It's a really difficult one ... because you feel like you should have coped ... like having the advantages you had that you should not be in this position. But ... I paid taxes when I worked ... and ... [*benefits are*] meant to be a safety net ... it's just the childcare thing. I've been doing the one

day ... if I had to put *[my child]* into childcare and my mum can't do it, it wipes out all the money ... I'm ... trying to set up this *[business idea]* ... it takes some money ... but it's something I can do with *[my child]*.

... there's no way we're going to ... sit around on benefits ... obviously at the moment it's a choice, isn't it? ... I just felt *[my child]* has already lost *[her]* dad, and to put her into a nursery full time? And I think, because of the kind of jobs I get ... it's more cost effective if both parents are out working, but when you've got one parent on a 20 grand salary ... or it could be less than that, and plus travel costs.

(Aisha)

Where their housing situation was stable, women in the study made caring decisions based on a moral rationality that took into account financial implications, to a greater or lesser extent, according to social class and former labour market attachment. This is similar to the nature of decision making found by Williams (2004), although here the context of imprisonment is an additional, and powerful, constraint.

Prisoners' partners with young children who left paid employment after the imprisonment may re-enter the labour market as children grow older and less dependent. They worked either while the children were at school or when extended family and community could provide (sometimes reciprocal) childcare. Employment was usually in low-waged, part-time, informal employment while children were young, so that earnings remained low:

I used to do evenings and my friend looked after her and then, when she was about a year-and-a-half, I did, I went back to work full time, um, agency work.

(Lorraine)

This activity was negotiated according to what was best for the children, even if it conflicted with an existing moral standpoint. The following extracts highlight the role of inadequacy of income in decision making:

... by the time that he'd gone to jail it was like a sort of a wake-up call really to say, right ... you've got the kids, you've got to do it ... Once he went back in again ... I knew what I had to do ... it was ... little menial jobs ... I know it's wrong ... but I was on Social Security, which is, like, my extra bit of money that I was earning to keep myself above water, because my children were so young I couldn't go back work full time because I just couldn't afford the childcare.

... It was hard ... the kids want something and you've got to say no ... I'm quite an independent person ... so where he's been away my children have not suffered at all ... apart from the fact, obviously, they've not had their dad around, but as in material things like clothes and, they haven't gone without ... If I hadn't had the money, I've always said to them, you know, I'll get it.

(Paula)

Here, paid employment is in large part related to a desire to protect the children from the economic consequences of their father's imprisonment, though they could not be protected from the emotional loss.

Where the children are older, imprisonment may continue to influence the nature of employment. In particular the tendency is to resort to informal forms of paid work to prioritise 'care'. One woman for instance worked informally as a carer. Her children had been repeatedly imprisoned. This resulted in her husband's exit from paid work. Elenor explained why she remained in informal employment:

I've gone into the cleaning ... I lost or didn't take on new jobs because I thought, well, I won't have the time ... to be able to go and visit them ... I thought I'd like to work in Tesco's and have something that was a bit more permanent and maybe better paid and I'd have stamps you know for my old age, that sort of thing *[laughs]*.

(Elenor)

Elenor's decision encapsulates one long-term implication of informal paid work, which women in particular combine with supporting the prisoner and/or childcare.

Previous research has not focused comprehensively on the social needs of African-Caribbean families (Light, 1995); however, our evidence illustrates the combination of risks that they face and the inadequacy of services. Reference was made above to the high rates of labour market participation found among women of African-Caribbean heritage (see p. 18). Perhaps this would mean that their decision making emphasised economic activity. Two women of Caribbean heritage were mothers, and had combined parenting and paid work prior to their relative's imprisonment. Despite their former labour market attachment, there were further obstacles to actual labour market involvement. Both families had been subject to threats of revenge attacks. The women requested temporary foster care for the grandchildren (as did one white woman), in one case to allow time to establish safe, stable housing and, in both, to recover emotionally and physically, to enable them to care. One woman's grandchildren were subsequently removed to local authority care<sup>5</sup> and her physical

health continued to decline. The other was allocated sub-standard housing. These events had shaped their absence from the labour market. Safe, habitable housing would have enabled the second woman to advance her plans to establish a home-based business, which she would have operated around the needs of her children.<sup>6</sup>

### Care, paid work and age

Williams (2004) has questioned the capacity of welfare policy to embrace groups whose employment-related decisions are shaped by structural factors. Together with lone parenthood, these include increasing age and/or disability. Lone grandparents face multiple barriers to employment, which may mean long-term benefit dependency while caring for prisoners' children. Two of the grandparent carers in this study (parenting prisoners' children) were in work prior to the imprisonment, but none was engaged in paid work at the time of interview, though one hoped to return to work after her relative's sentence was completed. This group is therefore prone to debt:

I've still got £9,000 ... credit card debt ... I'm paying interest and nothin' else ... I've struggled by like. They've got a way of saying, you're overdue with this, and I think, oh my God, and if there's anything left ... because it's late payments. I'm always ... playing catch-up, for years now ... but I can't even see a way out of it ... Once you're in it you never get out of it unless somebody helps you.

(Nadia)

No [*the bailiffs*], that's for the Council Tax ... I pay £10 a week out of my benefits.... I've only ever missed it about two times in a year, but like, this week, I haven't paid it cos I owe it to somebody else. But, next week now, I'll have to pay it. It'll be 20 quid ... I owe bills all over the place. I just fling them in the bin ... But there's nothing I can do, I just wait and think take me to court, lock me up, I'll go to jail for a few month and have a rest [*laughs*].

(Jean)

Welfare advice did not relieve anxiety through enabling an increase in income:

I wanted some financial help ... There ain't a law for me, that's what they say ... they give me £10, I think it was out of their own pocket ... but there was nothing really they could do. I just wanted to find agencies, to give something for the kids for Christmas and help with a few clothes or something. And just a little extra because, by the time I pay out



everything, how can you bring two kids up on £112 a week? ... I haven't even got any toilet paper, I'm fed up using newspaper *[laughs]* ... I sit there and watch about the charities on the telly ... I think my God it's just as bad here you know, but you don't see it, they put a house around you to hide it.

(Annette)

Some organisations that support prisoners' families offer direct financial support, traditionally at Christmas or to enable families to purchase, for instance, children's school clothing (Staff, Organisation D, 2005). However, very few families received support for the purchase of 'necessary' items such as washing machines. Until the 1970s, 'Extra Necessary Payments' from the then Department of Health and Social Security would have funded the purchase of such household items. Charitable donations have therefore replaced this particular role of the welfare state.

Younger women (aged 21–30), however, expressed intentions to re-enter paid employment:

... my baby is only under one and they wait till he gets to a year or two. But before they actually get on my back I want to do it myself ... hopefully I'll find something.

(Jaquie)

Two who had initially left the labour market, following the stress of the imprisonment, intended to retrain and re-enter the fields of paid work in which they felt they could use their experiences to a positive end.

The assumption of individual economic rationality underlying welfare policy in general, and in particular the NDLP, implies that opportunities to maximise income will be prioritised by impoverished individuals and that barriers to their employment can be minimised. However, imprisonment of a family member reinforces recognised structural barriers to employment, such as age, disability and lone parenthood. Described above are the struggles of grandparents – some with disabilities – who, following the imprisonment, became carers for one or more very young children, whom they considered had particular care needs (see also 'Children's responses to imprisonment' below). In addition, older women may suffer physical health problems and, along with younger women, psychological problems, including depression as a direct result of the strain of the imprisonment (see also below).

Imprisonment-related disadvantage, such as housing impacts, may further disrupt the family situation. Decisions to maximise income in this context through (re)-



entering full- or part-time paid work are at least likely to be delayed in the case of younger women and decisions that prioritise income in the case of older women while carers are simply not possible. Women who care for the children of prisoners therefore, whether as a parent or grandparent, fall into the 'hardest to help' groups, which the NDLP does not serve well (Evans *et al.*, 2003, p. 103).

Moreover, in making decisions about paid employment, women – including those who are members of prisoners' families – prioritise caring responsibilities over and above household income. The assumptions underlying the NDLP appear flawed in this context and, given the inadequacy of welfare provision, families face severe financial difficulties.

## Disadvantage among families of prisoners

The impact of imprisonment of a family member or partner extends beyond the financial and has implications for the social life, including the more tangible elements, such as housing and health, and the less tangible including social and familial relationships. Imprisonment also brings about costly disadvantages for families, which have public spending implications, discussed in the final section.

### Housing disruption

As mentioned above, structural factors are relevant in distributing the impact of, for example, financial shortfall or shortages of social housing:

... they contacted me to say that I was in rent arrears ... [*of*] about two-hundred-and-something pounds by this time. So, obviously, because you've got kids, you panic ... I still had to pay back that money myself out of my Social ... £6 [*a week*], which makes a difference.

(Dawn)

Dawn appealed and her arrears were eventually revoked, but the anxiety of coping with the distress, and subsequent financial shortfall, earned no compensation. Another interviewee's claim was lost in the system and she and her children were threatened with eviction. The threat was lifted only after she sought help from a local law centre.

Two women whose partners repeatedly offended protected their children from disruption of this nature. One lived separately from her partner and the other claimed

benefits separately while her substance-misusing partner was frequently rearrested within weeks of release.

Privately rented housing was particularly at risk if benefit claims were delayed, as large rent arrears accrued rapidly. Again, support from extended family, friends and local communities was critical, in particular in relation to housing during this period:

*[My husband's parents] paid £200 a month towards my rent ... [because] there was a shortfall ... [for] six months.*

(Heather)

These contributions usually had to be repaid to extended family members, as they were not in a position to donate relatively large sums of money.

Housing loss did occur for reasons other than those mentioned above. One grandmother, for instance, moved to live with her grandson following his mother's imprisonment. She moved in order to preserve any stabilising factors the child had in his life, following the imprisonment of his mother. This grandmother lost her own home as a result:

*... I've got nothing ... I [had] just started work, so I've lost my job, I've lost my home, I've lost half my furniture, and when [the prisoner] actually gets home, I've got nowhere to go. I mean, I could stay with her, but that would be completely impossible. It's not what I want.*

(Kathleen)

As described above, threats of violence also caused housing disruption. One family member refused an offer of what she considered to be unacceptably poor housing. They were then deemed intentionally homeless. Two families therefore lost their homes as a result of the imprisonment and others came perilously close. Imprisonment may entrench disadvantage through a worsening housing situation. The strategies families adopt, separating their finances or finances and housing from those of the prisoner and rejecting poor-quality housing, are underlaid by vulnerability and caring responsibilities.

### **Social isolation**

Information concerned with social isolation was obtained systematically, through a self-completed questionnaire.<sup>7</sup> Of the 21 respondents,<sup>8</sup> nine reported that they had no one to whom they could turn for help if they had financial problems or if they

were ill, and no one to whom they could turn for comfort or support in a serious crisis. Eight of the respondents reported that they had someone they could turn to if they were ill but not if they required financial help. The specific link between the imprisonment and social isolation was clear in cases, for instance, where individuals had been excluded by faith groups. In other cases there were factors, such as mental health problems or poverty itself, which may have blurred the link. The reasons cited for social isolation were: childcare and other caring responsibilities; no friends; lack of transport; paid work (lack of); physical access; financial limitations; and 'other' reasons.

### **Psychological impact of imprisonment, parenting and childhood experiences**

The effects of imprisonment for children of prisoners have been summarised and discussed (Laing and McCarthy, 2005; Murray, 2005; Murray and Farrington, 2006). Children's responses have been linked with trauma caused by infant–parent separation and Johnston (1995, p. 84) has argued that parental imprisonment results in long-term developmental problems.<sup>9</sup> Behavioural manifestations of developmental difficulties have been linked to the strain of remaining carers caused by a decrease in finances, disruption to accommodation and education, depression and poor-quality parenting. As Arditti *et al.* (2003, p. 202) notes, the pressures on mothers of children with imprisoned fathers are greater than those where separation from a parent is enforced, for example, through divorce or death.

The capacity of those on the outside to adapt to the imprisonment was strained as men, women and children suffered the emotional consequences of the often unforeseen loss of a family member. Data from a structured interview schedule indicate a very high rate (89 per cent) of depression in the sample. Partners of prisoners described symptoms of a grief reaction that manifests as strong feelings of depression (see below).

It's like he's my rock ... he's always been there, and he's not now, I'm on my own. It was like he died when he went. There's no other way to explain it. It's like I'm in this grieving process.

(Linda)

Other manifestations of loss and distress included psychosomatic illness, eating disorders and self-harm. Those who consulted their general practitioners (GPs) exercised caution in taking prescribed anti-depressants, fearing dependence on them. GPs either counselled the women themselves or referred them for counselling. In one case, emergency psychiatric treatment was required for acute depression.

Imprisonment also coincided with the onset or exacerbation of physical illnesses including asthma and Crohn's Disease. Mothers and (two) fathers of prisoners also described intense emotional responses to the imprisonment:

I would say that in the first, the first three months, I wanted to die myself. I didn't want to live ... I went on with the daily things, like ... but I just, I just felt like I wanted to die.

(Yasmin)

Mothers of prisoners' children found their depression debilitating during the early stages of the imprisonment. Carers for prisoners' children have to cope, not only with their own feelings, but also with the emotional responses to imprisonment of the children in their care. Maternal depression may affect child and adolescent development, and mental health through its effect on parenting behaviour:

Studies of parenting under conditions of economic hardship in particular show that increased parental depression and irritability result in more punitive, erratic and 'generally non-supportive' behaviour toward children.

(McLoyd, 1990, quoted in Braman, 2004, p. 168)

Carers were not asked directly about parenting patterns and, for some, recall may have been poor, but there was only one instance in which harsher parenting was mentioned. Contrary evidence included parenting approaches to challenging behaviours that were supportive and considered. Sometimes this involved working with schools, if they were informed:

A voluntary report card did help, because it maintained, um, a behaviour level for me that was acceptable ... It might not have been acceptable to the teacher and the other children, him being a bit loud and disruptive ... he wasn't badly behaved, he wasn't violent ... he'd no patience ... I suppose it was just his own frustrations ... with everything that had gone on ... he's quite sensitive ... But on the whole, he's just ... normal.

(Daniella)

This interviewee reflected on her own role in the child's behaviour:

... it might have been me that I'd been really upset, and it's played on his mind and hence he's ... been a bit contemptuous in class ... I was just trying to, um, look at every day as it came ... because I really didn't want it to affect him ... to a point where I've lost him ... we're eight months down

the line. Emotionally, we're more stable at home. I mean, my finances are still the same ... but we've now got our heads round [*the imprisonment*].  
(Daniella)

Although the implications of poverty and vulnerable parent–child relationships in prisoners' families have been documented, there is a complexity to the relationship between parenting patterns, depression and financial pressure, which is discussed further in the following section.

### Children's responses to imprisonment

Children's experiences are not, however, determined by the carer's parenting patterns, though these are clearly important in shaping them. They may be shaped also through wider processes. For example, one interviewee's grandchildren, the prisoner's children, were removed from her care following her requests for respite. This was a mixed-race family. The experiences of these children were mediated by the role of social services in monitoring 'deviant' families (Lewis, 2000) within the context of imprisonment.

Children's responses as described by their parents and carers in this study were similar to other studies cited above, although in three cases the children's stability was improved following the imprisonment with the positive behavioural effects. Even where the imprisoned parent/co-carer had not been resident in the children's home prior to imprisonment, interviewees described responses ranging from signs of missing the imprisoned individual (with all the implications for disrupted attachment) to distinct psychological disturbances:

The baby gets really ratty ... He's never been away from the baby before ... and the baby is really close to him ... the first couple of days he was so miserable ... I couldn't get him to sleep ... he wouldn't eat ... he wouldn't even let me put him down ... It took him about a week to settle down ... [*now*] he'll do things like ... crawl to ... and wait by the front door, cos like thinking he's going to come through ... Or he'll go over to his dad's pictures and he'll say hello to them and he picks them up and waves them around.  
(Jennie)

Children of prisoners in this study had been referred to a range of statutory agencies, including psychiatric services (both as out and inpatients), a health visitor, an educational behavioural unit and social services. The costs of interventions to the

National Health Service (NHS) and social services, together with the costs to families over a six-month period, are estimated in the final section of this chapter.

Amidst the enduring poverty, the parents and carers interviewed were attentive to the detail of the children's behaviour, and expressed a protective and caring approach to the emotional needs of the children. Supportive parenting following imprisonment has been recognised as a factor that might attenuate the impact of imprisonment on children (Johnston, 1995).

Murray and Farrington (2005, p. 1276) have examined the body of qualitative research that implies that children are affected by parental imprisonment through 'separation, stigma, loss of family income, reduced quality of care, poor explanations, and children's modelling of adult behaviour'. They suggest that the effects of parental imprisonment for children cannot entirely be explained by 'parental criminality, other associated risks, or parent child separation' (Murray and Farrington, 2005, p. 1276). They argue that, where multiple adversities are identified, parental imprisonment itself increases the risk of youth crime:

... imprisoning parents might cause antisocial behaviour and crime in the next generation and hence contribute to the intergenerational transmission of offending.

(Murray and Farrington, 2005, p. 1277)

These inferences are drawn predominantly from white men.

One woman was disturbed by her experiences. She explained how her child, who she described as mixed race, had been referred to an educational behavioural unit and had subsequently been excluded. Though there were a variety of experiences in the sample, structural difficulties in the treatment of African-Caribbean children in the education system have long been recognised (Grimshaw and Berridge, 1994). The disproportionate numbers excluded persist (Wright *et al.*, 2005; Amin *et al.*, no date). Cases of this kind are indicative of the need to be alert to the way in which prejudice and discrimination may affect the fortunes of individual children.

### **Stigma and its impact**

Information concerning social stigma was not sought systematically. However, it was experienced in the workplace among those interviewees who were formally employed (three), but did not appear to have an impact on engagement in paid employment. There were no cases where stigma led to exit from paid work; it was not

found to have prevented access to employment; nor was it mentioned as a reason for lack of paid work. Stigma may nevertheless have an impact on, for example, changes in hours to accommodate prison visits and, in all three cases, quality of life at work deteriorated, though income was not affected:

No [*I didn't tell them at work*], I think they figured it out. There was a lot of animosity at work because of it. Strange looks. Not being as friendly as they were ... because of the nature of the situation.

(Sylvia)

The significance of stigma lay in the likelihood of being associated with criminality and families were aware of the power that statutory agencies held in relation to their children:

I didn't want to tell anybody ... because I didn't know if social services would be involved. That to me is a big thing. I didn't want them around ... I'm not a drug addict or a criminal ... I didn't want them to think, oh, his dad's in jail, he needs help ... I just decided not to tell them. But, when I told the health visitor, she was so nice, she was like, everyone makes mistakes ... I'm not going to judge you.

(Claire)

Claire's husband had been earning prior to his imprisonment. This was evident from her accommodation and visual aspects of lifestyle. She perceived the response of this health professional positively and, on the whole, health professionals were viewed with less apprehension than, for example, social services or schools.

There was apprehension in relation to disclosing the imprisonment to schools:

No, I didn't [*tell the school*]. I thought they was too nosy, myself ... I was so terrified of them taking them off me. I just didn't want no one to know nothing.

(Helen)

In the event, perceptions of the way in which schools treated the children of prisoners were mixed. They ranged from schools as supportive to judgemental and stigmatising. Where social services were approached for support, or interventions were made against the wishes of the family, perceptions were either of inadequacy and lack of support or a damaging experience.



### La double peine

The additional sentence of deportation for foreign nationals convicted of an offence, or *La double peine* as it is called in France, has potentially catastrophic consequences, both financially and socially for the prisoners' family. Families of prisoners who had been recommended for deportation could not be interviewed directly, but anonymous details of two families' experiences were obtained from a senior welfare advice worker. In Case 1, without the caseworker's intervention, the consequences would have been serious. The family home, a small back-to-back house and their only asset, would have been lost. Moreover a child from a former relationship would have been permanently separated from his/her parent and the current family would all have had to emigrate to maintain their relationships. In Case 2, children would have been permanently separated from the deportee, for reasons that included the remaining parent seeking asylum in their own right. Visiting the prisoner was difficult as the relative held fears of culturally unacceptable search procedures. As a foreign national, this parent would not have had recourse to public funds.

### Family fragmentation and implications for release

The consequences of imprisonment damaged relationships between immediate family, partners and prisoners, or parents and prisoners, where the resulting myriad of problems were experienced as intolerable. Familial rifts were notable where the extended family could not, or did not, provide material and emotional support.

Nonetheless, policies regarding resettlement have more recently 'rediscovered' prisoners' families as valuable in facilitating and supporting resettlement. Codd (2005) has argued this policy shifts the responsibility for successful resettlement and could allow for the negative consequences of imprisonment to be relocated in the family.

With respect to release, the burdens placed on families varied with sentence length, age and 'race'. Where prisoners were serving a short sentence, families were apprehensive about the difficulties of reintegration:

I don't know whether it's going to work out between us. I've been on my own for such a long time and I rely on myself. I don't think he's going to be able to cope with that. I was wanting to go back to work and him look after *[our child]*. My job is *[evenings]* ... he could do a job in the day and me do this, but I ... don't know whether I'm going to be able to rely on him ... do I give him a chance or do I just ... say goodbye now?

(Marcia)



For two grandparents, release was viewed as a liberation from childcare, whereas a third grandparent, of African-Caribbean heritage, had lost her grandchildren to foster care following requests for respite care and this had damaged her relationship with her daughter, with implications for support on the daughter's release. Imprisonment tended to have a destabilising impact on family relationships, with no guarantee of willingness to continue the relationship, or support, on release. The role of the family during a prison sentence therefore has implications for a resettlement policy that relies on these individuals and families being willing and able to accommodate the prisoner at release.

## **Summary**

- Imprisonment had a negative financial impact on families, regardless of pre-imprisonment family structure or employment status. Families were vulnerable to financial instability, poverty and debt and potential housing disruption because of: loss of the prisoners' income; damaging financial transitions (e.g. from earned income to welfare benefits); and exit from paid work among those who care for prisoners' children. In addition, their financial outgoings increased: they paid all, or a proportion of, the costs of prison visiting over long distances; sent the prisoner cash for essential items; and purchased clothes and electrical goods, often new, through catalogues, in accordance with prison security regulations. Further, extended family, in particular women and probably migrant groups for whom kinship networks and commitments are significant, took on the care of prisoners' children. These findings add to a body of more recent evidence from the United States, which cites similar reasons for financial hardship among prisoners' families (Braman, 2002; Arditti *et al.*, 2003).
- Among women caring for prisoners' children, decisions about entering paid work conform to a recognised logic in prioritising the welfare of the children over household income.
- Within prisoners' families, women parenting alone face structural barriers to work, which are similar to those faced by other lone parents who might fall into the bracket of 'hardest to help' (see Chapter 1, p. 6 and Chapter 2, p. 31). However, structural barriers to employment are magnified in the context of the imprisonment. 'Lone parents' in the context of imprisonment include: grandmothers – with or without disabilities – who are caring for prisoners' children and who are physically challenged and struggling to meet the children's needs, never mind combining this with paid employment; women dealing with children of all ages who are adversely affected by the separation from their family member and whom they consider in need of their attention; and women who are being

treated for depression as a result of the imprisonment. Indeed, in the context of imprisonment, additional barriers to employment are experienced, including housing disruption and deportation of the prisoner, relevant here to those women of British nationality eligible to join the New Deal, but partnered with foreign national prisoners who will be deported.

- The New Deal for Lone Parents prioritises access to work. However, our evidence shows that this government tool, clearly identified as one key to meeting child poverty reduction targets (HM Treasury, 2004b), has been and may continue to be ill-suited and therefore ineffective in relation to this group.
- Families' views of statutory services were mixed. However, there were strong concerns about the power that services could wield over families, especially in making decisions about the care of children.
- The pressures borne by families throughout a term of imprisonment had a destabilising or fragmentary impact on relationships, with implications for release. This finding raises question marks with respect to policy that focuses on the family as a resettlement tool.

So far we have focused on the qualitative implications of the data. The final section of this chapter will present estimates of the financial costs to families of supporting a family member in prison. Below we look at the additional costs with which the families have to manage from their low incomes. The information is different in nature to that presented above in that it quantifies, as far as possible, the measurable costs of imprisonment to individual families and the wider society.

### **The economic impact of imprisonment for families and wider social costs**

This section estimates the actual costs of imprisonment both to the individual family and to society. As we have seen above, families of prisoners suffer the impact of separation as a result of imprisonment and associated economic as well as social costs. Families are likely to face issues with housing, reductions in income and deterioration in physical and mental health, etc. (Loucks, 2004). Although the study was not designed to elicit these costs, some useful information was gathered during the interviews concerning household finances and service use associated with the imprisonment, which gives indicative evidence of likely economic consequences for families and, through looking at health, housing and social service use, of some of the immediate costs of imprisonment to the wider society.

This study identified families of prisoners who met the income-based measure of poverty of household income of 60 per cent or less of the median household income in 2005 (Palmer *et al.*, 2005). Families presented in the following cases all meet this criterion.

### **The families**

The cases of five families were selected for analysis within this section, on the basis of variation in terms of age, ethnicity, family structure pre-and post-imprisonment, level of service use and employment history and status. Their relatives' sentences varied between six months and eight years. Two of the families were of African-Caribbean heritage and three were white British. Of the family members interviewed in the cases outlined below, two were aged between 21 and 30 years, one was 31–40 and two were 41–50 years old. To preserve anonymity, we have removed the interviewees' names, as well as some minor details of their circumstances, which have no cost implications. Some additional information is presented independently of the cases, below.

#### *Case 1: mother of a prisoner*

This woman is the mother of a male prisoner. She works part time in low-paid employment, despite a period of depression for which she required counselling. Her extended family has not been as supportive during this sentence as they were during a previous sentence. She visits the prison irregularly, in part because of the cost of visiting and in part because prisons are difficult to reach by public transport.

#### *Case 2: grandparent*

This interviewee is a lone parent and grandparent. One of her daughters, who has two children, is now serving a lengthy sentence. She has been held in prisons at great distances from her mother, who still has her younger child living with her. Following the imprisonment, this interviewee took on the care of her grandchildren. One grandchild was allocated a full-time nursery place. New caring responsibilities following the imprisonment forced her to leave her full-time job and claim state benefits. She now has significant debts. Her physical health has since deteriorated significantly, to the point where she feels full-time employment would be difficult to sustain. She visits her GP for support and treatment of her chronic illness.

### *Case 3: resident prisoner's partner with one child*

This woman was living with her partner when he received a short custodial sentence. Prior to being imprisoned he had been in paid work, while she had parented their child. The couple did not receive any tax credits since his income was above the threshold. Since the imprisonment this woman has had to claim state benefits for herself and their child. The usual time taken to process the benefit claim was potentially threatening to her status as a private tenant. She had to disguise the fact that she had become reliant on benefits. The young child displayed physical and behavioural responses to the separation, which required treatment.

### *Case 4: resident partner*

This woman's partner was in full-time work until he was imprisoned. She has claimed state benefits since he went to prison. She has suffered a general worsening and acute episodes of a formerly minor, but chronic, stress-related physical illness. Her GP treats this illness and her depression for which she was referred for counselling. She visits the prison regularly but visiting costs far more than she can claim. A homeowner, she finds it increasingly difficult to finance the running costs of her inner-city dwelling.

### *Case 5: non-resident partner with child(ren)*

This woman's non-resident partner was served with a short sentence. Prior to his imprisonment, he co-parented the child(ren) and contributed financially, while living in rented accommodation in a nearby village. Our interviewee claimed state benefits prior to the imprisonment and has continued to do so. During a previous sentence the child(ren) were cared for by a grandmother and their mother was treated by the GP for a long period, as she was emotionally disturbed by the separation.

For each of the cases we will give a conservative estimate of the cost to agencies and families because of imprisonment. We focus below on four main areas: income, housing, health and social service use. The costs methodology is described in Chapter 1.

## **Income**

Using data from our interviews and those of national surveys, we look at how our group compares with similar individuals meeting the income-based measure of

poverty in Great Britain. The interviews show a range of individual experiences and issues directly related to imprisonment. We specifically sought to avoid cases where the relationship with the imprisonment was ambiguous.

As discussed earlier, family members interviewed lacked a steady source of income (other than that received from the State), which is a major cause of poverty (Sutherland *et al.*, 2003). Although our families do not fit neatly into the family types identified in the *Households Below Average Income* report for 2003/04 (DWP, 2006a), the nearest and most appropriate family type was used.

Discussing income was a sensitive issue for most families but they were prepared to give the bands within which their income fell. Undoubtedly, weekly incomes of families fell after the imprisonment and were significantly below 60 per cent of median incomes of families in Great Britain (as shown in Table 2).

**Table 2 Comparison of poverty level (60 per cent of median Before Housing Costs [BHC]) in 2003/04 prices in Great Britain compared to cases**

Cases	Poverty level for similar family type in Great Britain (£ per week)	BHC income for cases in the study (£ per week)	State benefits as a percentage of income
1	123	100	100
2	216	51–100	100
3	216	51–100	100
4	216	101–199	100
5	123	101–199	100

For nearly all families, their only source of income after the imprisonment was state benefits, both income support and housing benefit, which was substantially below the poverty level. The steady increases in indirect taxes in real terms since 1997 raised additional expenditure concerns for these families and put them at greater risk of remaining on incomes below the poverty level (DWP, 2006a).

### Housing

Three of the women in our five cases stated that there were issues with housing because of the imprisonment. One indicated that she wanted to move but was concerned that the accommodation being offered was inadequate, given that it was a one-bed flat, and the son when released would need to live with her since he would have nowhere else to go. For the second woman, her housing issues related to the distance she had to travel to visit and high visiting costs. She was able to pay visiting

costs while employed but it became difficult when she had to depend on friends. She had made an unsuccessful claim for travel costs. The third woman owned her own home but the costs of maintaining and servicing it from a single person's benefits income left her with very little disposable income.

**Health and social service use**

Imprisonment may result in a deterioration of physical and mental health (Loucks, 2004; and see earlier in this chapter). Families visited their GPs regularly for depression and many were referred for counselling; however we have no details on the frequency and duration of counselling on which to estimate these costs. One of the women in our cases who received treatment for depression was also receiving treatment for a systemic illness, which, she stated, was exacerbated by the stress of the imprisonment.

One family was also receiving two hours of help daily with household chores, due in part to the debilitating effects of depression and physical ill-health. Two children were also placed in foster care as a result of the imprisonment (see Table 3).

**Table 3 Health and social service use by sample of cases**

Services	Cases using service	Frequency of use and description	Unit cost	Source
GP	1, 2, 4, 5	Surgery consultation lasts 10 minutes	£21 per consultation	Curtis and Netten (2005)
Eating disorders inpatient unit	2	Assuming 5 weeks* spent in unit for children with eating disorder	£305 per bed day	Department of Health (2004)
Foster care	2	Care for 2 children	£350 per week	Office of National Statistics (2005)
Home help	2	Provided 2 hours per week	£12 per weekday hour	Curtis and Netten (2005)
Social work (children)	4	Social worker supervised weekly visits	£104 per child per week	Curtis and Netten (2005)

\* Average inpatient stay for eating disorder ten weeks, based on information provided by Wandsworth NHS Teaching Primary Care Trust (2005).

As well as input from outside agencies, there was financial input from parents and spouses themselves. The women sent money to the prisoner and there was the added cost of travel to the prison (see Table 4). In one of the five cases, an individual was supported by an organisation that takes families to visit or assists with prison

visits. However, not all visitors have been successful in claiming the cost of prison visits or have access to, or are aware of, support organisations that would take them to visit.

**Table 4 Unit cost of items incurred personally by sample of cases**

Items	Cases using service	Description	Unit cost	Source
Clothing	2, 3	Clothing, expenditure on clothing assumed to have been incurred twice weekly	£21.50 per week	Office of National Statistics (2004b)
Home security system	2	Assuming use of most common monitored security system – ‘bells only’	£65 per month	<a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/crime/prevention/alarms.shtml">http://www.bbc.co.uk/crime/prevention/alarms.shtml</a>
Petrol	2	Transport to the prison, assuming cost per mile based on Renault Clio	8.1p per mile	Taylor, A. (2006)

*Cost to agencies and families*

The total cost to agencies averaged £4,810 per family over six months (Table 5). Of this total, 51 per cent was borne by social services. Subsidised housing (including housing benefits) was not included, as it was unlikely to be directly related to the imprisonment. There is also a wide range for the direct costs, between £0 and £10,854, which indicates that some families’ needs (indeed for one family in particular) were more complex.

**Table 5 Total cost to services and family over six months**

Services	Cost by cases (£)					Average costs
	1	2	3	4	5	
<i>Cost to agencies:</i>						
NHS	504	10,854	0	179	189	2,345
Social service	0	9,724	0	2,600	0	2,465
<i>Costs of support provided by family</i>						
Visiting	0	951	0	182	807	388
Monetary support	256	0	120	663	0	208
Clothing and incidental	0	43	20	0	247	62
Home security	0	390	0	0	0	78
<i>Costs of support provided by extended family and friends</i>						
	0	0	1,572	0	0	314
Total cost	760	21,962	1,712	3,624	1,243	5,860
Lost earnings	0	9,090	15,600	0	6,332	6,204



There were many costs borne by the families, including financial support, provision of clothing and other incidentals, visiting costs and, to a lesser extent, home security (Table 4). For grandparents, the costs of taking on a child(ren) outstrip any additional income that can be claimed, such as child benefit).<sup>10</sup> We estimated also the loss of earnings (Table 5). At least one person had to give up work because of the imprisonment. For two of the cases there was a loss of earnings where partners were employed before imprisonment. Although it was challenging to obtain an estimate for lost earnings, it is important that these impacts are not overlooked.

The full cost per family averaged £5,860, including the cost to agencies and the cost of support provided by family and relatives. The cost of a single intervention may range as high as £10,854 (NHS only) and this offers an indication of the heterogeneity of the experiences felt by the family as a result of imprisonment. The highest-costing family received NHS care for two family members (one as an inpatient) and a long-term social services intervention.

Across the five cases, we estimated the average personal cost to the family and relatives over six months to be £1,050, which translates into a monthly estimate of £175 per month and the average loss in earnings to be £6,204 over a six-month period. These figures are conservative estimates and costs are likely to be higher.

Loss in earnings averaged £6,204 and ranged from £6,332 to £15,600 over the period. Of the five cases identified in this costing exercise, two prisoners, prior to incarceration, provided a main source of income for the household (for the study as a whole, at least nine were main income earners prior to imprisonment) and this income is lost.

The costs of imprisonment are conventionally arrived at by estimating how much is spent to secure and maintain the prisoner. One estimate suggests that sending one person to prison for one year costs £37,500 (SEU, 2002).

Our estimates suggest that these costs are too narrow and that additional costs to individual families and the public purse be considered. The average total cost of the selected cases was £5,860 for six months, which translates into £11,720 for a year. If this cost was added to the conventionally estimated cost of imprisonment per annum, it would mean that the underlying total cost would be £49,220 – an increase of 31 per cent in the cost estimate. This total figure is based only on five selected cases and although it covers the wide range of possible agency specific and familiar cost drivers, more research is needed on a larger sample to arrive at a more robust estimate.



We have no way of knowing the number of cases to which such an average cost might be applicable. However, these seem to be not untypical cases and the additional costs for the population are therefore likely to be significant. It is therefore reasonable to assume that conventional estimates do leave out significant costs of the kind we have described. Those responsible for future estimates should be mindful of the need to consider such costs and to take appropriate measurements wherever possible.

## **Summary**

- This section presents the findings from five family members interviewed. The information it provides, though illustrative, is powerful. It presents a range of individual experiences and issues arising directly because of imprisonment, rather than exacerbation of an existing problem. The interview data has been analysed to arrive at estimates of the accumulating cost to agencies and the family during the sentence, over a six-month period.
- The total cost to agencies over a six-month period, as a direct result of the imprisonment of a family member, averaged £4,810 per family, 51 per cent of which was borne by social services.
- The average personal cost to the family and relatives was estimated at £1,050 over a six-month period, a monthly cost of £175 per month.
- The full cost per family over six months, including the cost to agencies and the cost of support provided by family and relatives, averaged £5,860.
- Loss of prisoners' or partners' earnings averaged £6,204 over the six months, ranging between £6,332 and £15,600.
- The estimated total cost of imprisonment would rise by 31 per cent if the costs to the family and wider society were included in the calculation.

The following chapter moves away from individual family experiences – although some interview data are employed – to examine the possibilities of support for families. It will present the results of a national mapping exercise and a survey of services for prisoners' families. Information concerning fundamental business issues obtained from service staff is examined to assess the overall capacity and effectiveness of existing services to address poverty and disadvantage among this client group.

# 3 An assessment of current service responses to poverty and disadvantage

## A survey and economic evaluation of services to prisoners' families

### Introduction

The level of need revealed in the last chapter turns a searching spotlight on current services. This chapter examines the kinds of services available to relieve poverty among prisoners' families based on a survey of five services (Appendix 6). The aim of the survey was to identify interesting schemes, which were considered to undertake appropriate and effective work with prisoners' families, and which contained an anti-poverty element within their work. It is the effectiveness of their work in addressing poverty that is the focus of the discussion in this chapter.

This chapter begins by presenting an outline of the five services (see Box 2 and Table 7). Several issues that affected the capacity of organisations and services to provide advice, information, etc. to prisoners' families are discussed, including funding, sustainability, staffing and feedback from service users. We then move on to assess the capacity of services to address poverty and disadvantage.

In the second part of the chapter we present an economic evaluation of the services, which analyses financial data and provides an estimate of average expenditure on each service per client, and assesses the total cost of each service.

### Box 2 Outline of services surveyed

*Service A: national service offering financial support with prison visiting*

- *Sector:* statutory sector.
- *Funding and resources:* annual funding. Staffing: four full-time management/senior staff; 13 full- and part-time administrative staff, three full- and part-time clerical staff.

*Continued*

- *Target group*: eligible low-income prisoners' families or sole visitors.
- *Service*: 'To promote family ties by helping qualifying visitors with the cost of prison visits' (service document, 2004/95, p. 2), including transport, overnight stays, subsistence and childcare.

*Service B: community-based prisoner and family support service*

- *Sector*: voluntary sector.
- *Funding and resources*: statutory and charitable. Staffing: two paid staff, 20 volunteers.
- *Target group (Service B only)*: prisoners of African and Caribbean heritage and 'Asian' heritage, and the family 'unit'.
- *Service*: advice and support offered to the offender and family unit.

*Service C: community-based and wider support services: local and regional. Includes telephone helpline (consortium member and local), women-only family centre*

- *Sector*: voluntary sector.
- *Funding and resources*: project-based charitable and local government sources.
- *Staff*: four paid staff (various part-time hours) and volunteers – at least 50.
- *Target group*: prisoners' families and friends.
- *Service*: court-based advice and information, telephone helpline (consortium and local), information and advice, home visiting, family services including a drop-in and women-only family centre.

*Service D: community-based family support service. Includes telephone helpline (consortium member and local)*

- *Sector*: voluntary sector.
- *Funding and resources*: charitable and some statutory funds. Staffing: one full-time family services manager\*, one part-time family worker, one part-time helpline co-ordinator.
- *Target group*: prisoners' families and visitors to two local prisons.

*Continued overleaf*

- *Service*: telephone helpline (national and local), drop-in services\*\*, accommodation for long-distance prison visitors\*\*, advice and information, family-friendly facilities at local prisons.

\* During the course of the research, the family services manager post has been closed.

\*\* During the course of the research, these services were withdrawn.

### *Service E: Visitor Centre (VC) based community support organisation*

- *Sector*: voluntary sector.
- *Funding and resources*: one large charitable grant, small grants from statutory/charity sectors. Staffing: five core staff (four full time), four playworkers. Other sessional services provided. Some volunteers.
- *Target group*: local community, prison staff, prisoners, prisoners' families and friends.
- *Service*: advice, information and advocacy, specialist advice sessions, counselling, massage, yoga. Community days at the VC.

## Service funding and sustainability

### *Statutory funding: Service A*

This service was part of a larger unit that had provided services not only to families of inmates but also to victims of crime. This section of the unit targeted individuals visiting a close relative or partner in prison, especially people on low incomes (Box 2). It administered financial contributions towards the costs of travel for 26 prison visits per year (Table 6). Public transport costs were fully funded, undoubtedly enabling some families to visit who would otherwise have been unable to. However, the rates paid to families were closely tied to the level of funding allocated to the service. In calculating the rates, allowances were made for fluctuations in application rates to ensure the budget would not be exceeded (Staff Service A: 2005). Where a fall in applications occurred, reflecting an overall fall in prison visiting, the annual budget was reduced accordingly (Staff Service A: 2005).

The budget for this service was therefore sustained in the absence of any major structural changes within the funding source, but financial limitations mean that, apart from the full reimbursement of public transport costs, the rates paid to families for other costs such as subsistence or car mileage have not been a reflection of the real costs.

**Table 6 Services: function and capacity**

Service	Management and funding	Provision and coverage
A	<p><i>Management:</i> line management – accountability to a government office.</p>	<p><i>Provision:</i> the service provided ‘a contribution towards the costs of prison visiting’, up to a maximum of 26 visits per year, plus additional non-social visits, e.g. for sentence planning. Claims were assessed by trained, supervised staff. Eligibility was dependent on receipt of means-tested benefits or low income. Public transport costs were reimbursed in full. Other rates paid were low: car mileage @ 12p per mile, childminding @ £2.75 per hour, subsistence @ £2.50 per five hours and @ £5.10 over ten hours.</p> <p><i>Coverage:</i> prisons and voluntary organisations promote the service.</p>
B	<p><i>Management:</i> line management accountable to trustees. Trustee and ex-service user representation on some service sub-committees.</p>	<p><i>Provision:</i> this was divided into two differing Service Level Agreements (SLAs). The funding streams were ‘Communities against Drugs’ – SLA(i) – and ‘Community Partnership’ funds – SLA(ii). Under SLA(i), family work was ‘added value’ to core work with prisoners under the Reducing Re-offending agenda. The paid worker offered telephone advice and support only to families referred by prisoners. Trained volunteers undertook direct family support and counselling. SLA (ii) provided for direct family support alongside prisoner support by the paid worker. Thirty per cent of telephone callers required ongoing support. Disadvantage was addressed in a variety of ways.<sup>a</sup></p> <p><i>Coverage:</i> families of prisoners of African, Caribbean or ‘Asian’ heritage. Some referrals were from local voluntary organisations and local individuals referred themselves.</p>

a Disadvantage involves experiences of ‘stigma’, implicitly defined by organisations as ignorance and fear of prisoners and those associated with them. Innovative means such as radio broadcasts have been used to challenge stigmatising views held within local communities. Within the family services surveyed, support for disadvantaged family members is non-judgemental and non-hierarchical, creating what the families regard as a ‘safe’ or comfortable environment for sharing experiences.

Table 6 Services: function and capacity – Continued

Service	Management and funding	Provision and coverage
C	<i>Management:</i> line management accountable to trustees. Service user and volunteer representation.	<p><i>Provision:</i> family support services included court-based support, face-to-face advice and information, befriending, a drop-in including self-development workshops and post-release support, consortium and local telephone helplines, free activities and holidays for children and families, and welfare payments in cases of extreme hardship.<sup>b</sup> Training in family support.</p> <p><i>Coverage:</i> city-wide outreach through befriending. Regional coverage via one helpline.</p>
D	<i>Management:</i> family services (FS) under organisation-wide 'business management'. Line management within FS.	<p><i>Provision:</i> family support services included a community-based drop-in centre, advice and information, visitor accommodation, family work at local prisons. These services were withdrawn during the course of the research in a restructuring of services (see 'Coverage' below). Consortium and local telephone helplines remained operational.</p> <p><i>Coverage:</i> initially local community and visitors to local prisons. Currently helpline coverage.</p>
E	<i>Management:</i> line management model accountable to trustees and the funding body.	<p><i>Provision:</i> VC-based advice, information, 'listening-ear' service, a specialist advice worker, counselling and massage. A 'family forum' where families presented their questions to the prison governor. Stigma was challenged through 'outward-looking' services and the aim was to draw the local geographical community to the prison and the VC for social events.</p> <p><i>Coverage:</i> this service was not fully established.</p>
b		<p>Some organisations provide small-scale financial assistance for essential items such as washing machines, when families cannot either afford to buy one or obtain a loan from the Social Fund. Morris (1965) recommended that discretionary payments from the then National Assistance Board should be replaced with grants 'as of right' for essential items such as clothing and household equipment. Instead, grants have been replaced by Social Fund loans. Repaying loans can cause further hardship (Legge <i>et al.</i>, 2006). Charitable organisations have stepped in to alleviate acute distress with small one-off welfare payments when, for instance, washing machines break down. At Christmas, gifts of money and/or presents for prisoners' children are offered (Staff Service C: 2005; Staff Service D: 2005).</p>

In addition, there is a requirement of this service to comply with legislation that grants 26 visits per year, plus 'non-social' visits – for example, for sentence planning. However, there are no restrictions on visiting for remand prisoners and those on 'enhanced' regimes may be entitled to weekly visits. Funding for more frequent visits was not advocated because this might have placed those families who travelled long distances under greater pressure to undertake difficult journeys more often (Staff Service A: 2005). Voluntary organisations have remained uncertain as to the level of need in this respect (Gampell, 2006). The families in this study visited as often as they were able or could afford to.

#### *Voluntary sector services: funding strategies*

Sources of funding for the services surveyed are outlined in Box 2. Some problems associated with reliance on charitable funding were that few charities will fund work with families of prisoners (Staff Service B: 2005; Staff Service C: 2005). When obtained, funding was usually short-term (three years or less). This was not sufficient time to fully develop services, in particular those services that have direct contact with families. Funding was then difficult to replace, which left services vulnerable to closure (Staff Service B: 2005; Staff Service C: 2005).

There were difficult choices to be made about funding packages (project-based versus organisation-based funding), which failed to remove anxieties over core costs or uncertainties about the future. One strategy was to obtain a large charitable grant from a generic funder to cover the costs of establishing and funding an entire organisation over five years. This allowed for stability and offered the capacity for service development and maturity that may have been sufficient to interest other funding bodies when the grant expired (Staff Service E: 2005). However, the organisation's future as a whole was uncertain, which discouraged long-term service development planning.

Existing organisations had moved to project-based funding. The loss of a grant then threatened a service rather than the organisation as a whole (Staff Service C: 2005), though morale was adversely affected (Staff Service C: 2005) and interdependent services were disrupted. Core costs were also difficult to cover. Close and ongoing relationships with small funders (Staff Service C: 2005) were also established to maintain grant provision.

The precariousness of charitable funding was reported to stifle creative, appropriate and effective service development (Staff Service B: 2005; Staff Service D: 2005).



### *Experiences of statutory funding for family services*

Funding from statutory sources has been linked to Service Level Agreements (SLAs), which emphasised client referral numbers. Staff and management wished to maintain the aims and quality of the service and prevent it from becoming target-driven. This created a tension because, during the contract period, referrals were in excess of agreed targets, while funding remained static. In addition, SLA targets were increased as a condition of contract renewal (Staff Service B: 2005).

The funding streams that financed SLAs were subject to policy change. SLAs are renegotiated annually and, although this funding provided stability in the short term, long-term service planning is more difficult. The more immediate vulnerability of this funding strategy lay in the then proposed introduction of regionally based competitive tenders for National Offender Management Service (NOMS) contracts. Nevertheless the funding was sought because charitable funds were difficult to obtain.

### **Restructuring family services**

The organisation in which Service D was located had expanded and specialised in Visitor Centre (VC) provision, management and services (Staff Service D: 2005). When statutory funds were available, new VCs were built. The organisation ran and employed a small core of appropriately qualified staff. Direct family support often relied on volunteers (Staff Service D: 2005). Volunteer training could be implemented more efficiently because development costs were spread, although funding still had to be obtained from the prison service as charitable funds rarely covered training costs. VC services have also been standardised. Both the economies of scale achieved in training costs and standardisation will be significant in the tendering process under the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).

VCS have an important role to play in providing prisoners' families with a place to wait, and with information and advice about prison visiting and creating awareness of, and/or signposting to, local services (Users Service D – two cases; user interviewees – five cases: 2005). However, while volunteers for Service D attended an accredited training programme, their skills lay in their capacity to empathise, while signposting and referral skills may not have been adequately developed (Staff Service D: 2005). This meant that families may not have been made aware of local services from which advice concerning welfare and financial issues would be available, be these specialist services for prisoners' families, local law centres or other welfare advice agencies.



The demise of local community-based services reduced access to specialist advice and information for families who could not or did not visit prisons. Families may have had access to assistance provided through telephone helpline services but the specialist knowledge required to deal effectively with enquiries was not always available. Families may have approached generic local services for advice, but perceived and actual stigma meant they might not have disclosed that their difficulties were related to the imprisonment of a relative or partner, and advice may therefore have been less comprehensive than it would have been had the organisation been fully aware of all the financial and welfare issues associated with imprisonment. Moreover, in the absence of community-based services, evidence that would have helped to demonstrate the impact of imprisonment, and families' needs, went unrecorded.

### *Staffing and volunteers*

Voluntary organisations were relying on a small core staff, in some cases working long and/or antisocial hours because of understaffing (Staff Service C: 2005; Staff Service E: 2005) and the demanding nature of the work. There was a heavy reliance on volunteers in all organisations for face-to-face advice and support for families, including telephone advice work (Staff Service D: 2005).

Motivation to volunteer may be related to personal experience<sup>1</sup> (Volunteer Service C: 2005; Staff Service B: 2005; User Service C: 2005; User Service D: 2005) or membership of a community within which imprisonment rates are disproportionately high.<sup>2</sup> Volunteering is thus also a contribution to the sense of solidarity and support within geographical and/or minority communities.

Reliance on volunteers presents various challenges; funding for volunteer training has been difficult to obtain (Staff Service B: 2005; Staff Service C: 2005, Staff Service D: 2005) and so most were trained only to a basic level. Volunteers have been difficult to recruit and retain (Staff Service B: 2005; Staff Service D: 2005; Staff Service E: 2005), placing a burden on core staff, who contributed to their training (Staff Service D: 2005).

Volunteers could, with experienced supervision, offer befriending and emotional support but were less able than appropriately trained experienced staff to deal effectively either with the range and complexity of problems with which they may have been presented, or with their own emotional responses.

### Feedback from service users, and their experiences of services

#### *Feedback to Service A*

Feedback regarding access to, and quality of, service provision was obtained for the most part from users of Service A through an annual questionnaire survey. This is distributed at random to a thousand successful applicants with their payments (Staff Service A: 2005). Feedback from the 2003 survey was positive but did not seek information, for instance, concerning the proportion of household income that residual visiting costs demand. The survey was only sent to successful applicants, in English, which ruled out obtaining information about expenditure on visits among unsuccessful applicants or those not eligible to claim.

Currently, feedback was also obtained from representatives of organisations supporting prisoners' families who discussed difficulties with service eligibility, which they gathered from direct involvement with families (Staff Service A: 2005; Staff Service D: 2005).

However, there was a perception among prisoners' families that this service was part of the wider welfare benefits system. One reason for this was that travel warrants used to be issued at benefit offices (User Interviewees [two cases] Service A: 2005). Benefit officers did not receive training about financial assistance for prison visits. This potentially disadvantaged those visitors who were less able to avail themselves of written information, including those who were illiterate, had learning difficulties, or suffered from mental health problems (Non-user Interviewee Service A: 2005; Interviewee Ex-user Service A: 2005; Interviewee Users Service A [two cases]: 2005). In addition, eligible visitors may not have claimed for reasons that included ignorance of the scheme, a misunderstanding of the available information, or fear of the impact on other benefits and the application process.<sup>3</sup> Among successful applicants, the low level of current rates paid was the source of added financial hardship. Among those who used their entitlement to visit more frequently the financial impact was worse (Interviewee Users [three cases] Service A: 2005).

Feedback sought through questionnaires provided little systematic evidence about the views of failed claimants, those who found completing the forms difficult, or those too discouraged to claim.

#### *Feedback to Services B, C, D and E*

Feedback within other organisations and services was gathered in a variety of ways. Services B, C and D used exit questionnaires for anonymous feedback, which was

used to further service development such as providing post-release support (Staff Service B: 2005; Staff Service D: 2005; Staff Service C: 2005). Service E obtained feedback information from the various service providers for quarterly reports to funders. Evidence that objectives were being met was obtained through evaluations and direct feedback from service users, such as comments or letters. A comments book was available in the VC.

The mutual support offered through family drop-in sessions was viewed positively by women using Service C. In particular, any activities for children that were offered free of charge, including summer holidays, were appreciated for their value in 'normalising' children's experiences within those of their peer group. Family support and self-help groups may have created dependency, and self-help drained the resources of some users. Professional counselling, on the other hand, would have offered an additional emotional outlet and support. The assumption was made, within services, that women would take responsibility for caring roles. Services geared to support them in doing so have been criticised (Codd, 2002) because, in the process, women's own development was marginalised. There are, however, examples of services where users define the purpose and nature of the service (Staff Service C: 2005; Staff Service E: 2005). Awareness of self-development was encouraged in one service, through self-development workshops (Staff Service C: 2005).

With respect to the active involvement of users in service provision, while this was valued by families, it caused additional strain for some individuals who were already under pressure, and by the tendency to offer greater caring responsibilities at the expense of wider personal development.

#### *Foreign nationals and deportees*

Users of Services B and E suffered from the combined impact of threatened deportation of a family member in prison and exclusion from public funds (Sentencing Advisory Panel, 2005; and see Chapter 2 and Appendix 8 of this report). In 2004, an estimated 25 per cent of the client base of SLA(i), involving approximately 35 families, faced deportation orders (Staff Service B: 2005). Numbers and proportions of families of foreign national prisoners facing the prospect of deportation of their family member are likely to increase (Clarke, 2006; Reid, 2006; see also Appendix 8 of this report). A deportation order is a more permanent measure than removal of an individual and so may lead to permanent dislocation of the family, in particular those of refugees and asylum seekers.

Relatives of prisoners who were not British nationals may either have had no recourse to public funds or have faced restrictions on benefit entitlements (Appendix 8). Occasionally, support organisations have enabled access to very limited alternative funds (a 'one-off' payment) but, beyond advice and information, there was usually little they could offer (Staff Service B: 2005). Organisations saw fewer families of foreign nationals, possibly because the families assumed they had no recourse to public funds (Staff Service B: 2005). Faith communities or extended family may have been a temporary source of alternative support and so the cost was borne within the local community. The ongoing vulnerability of families in this situation was evident.

### **Capacity to address poverty and disadvantage**

In principle, Service A had the potential to ameliorate a proportion of the additional, excessive and sometimes long-term financial pressure that imprisonment placed on families and the disadvantage associated with separation. Eligible applicants could have been saved the deeper hardship that resulted from maintaining relationships, and/or enabling children to maintain attachments to imprisoned parents, had the rates paid by Service A reflected the true costs of all visits.

What proportion of the eligible prisoner family population the service reached was not known, as estimates were not produced of numbers eligible to apply in relation to the prison population, nor was information that would have identified problems in reaching particular groups gathered. Effective monitoring and analysis of take-up figures by ethnic group, in relation to the prison population, might have been a means of addressing this problem. For families who visited more than 26 times a year, flexibility in the number of visits funded would have been beneficial. This may be a significant area of untapped need. Service A did not address the needs of families whose benefit access was restricted through immigration legislation.

A key function of voluntary sector services is to create awareness of, and enable access to, unclaimed benefits among eligible families. Their capacity to alleviate poverty and disadvantage was limited because these benefits provide a very low level of income for workless households (Piachaud, 2005; User Interviewees Services B, C and D: 2005). Moreover some foreign nationals may not have recourse to public funds (see below). Charity offered in the face of extreme hardship did not substitute for the grants formerly available through the benefits system, which had covered the costs of essential items (see note b under Table 6).

Community-based organisations were part of a diversity that existed locally and, as such, were well placed to meet the distinct needs of local populations. Where

VCs were embedded in the local community, or had developed close links with diverse local community organisations, these needs would still be met. The role of community-based organisations in responding to new developments and problems that affected prisoners' families remained significant. The relocation of services from the community to the prison Visitors' Centres and telephone advice lines placed a responsibility on these services to link effectively with local generic services. Volunteer work was crucial to the functioning of services and therefore effective supervision, support and training was vital, along with access to specialist knowledge.

Liaison with relevant local community groups and/or other national organisations would enable prisoner family support groups to incorporate the specific needs of families who were further disadvantaged through stigma and/or prejudice(s). This means ensuring that general service provision or training programmes recognise the needs of families of minority ethnic groups, gypsies and travellers, families of prisoners who have committed sexual offences and those held under the Terrorism Act 2000. The remit of some organisations supporting prisoners' families may not currently be to work with families on, for instance, deportation issues, but these will become increasingly significant among their client group. Capacity to address the needs of families facing deportation orders will require staff training and/or awareness of organisations that can offer detailed advice and information.

## Summary

- Both statutory and charitable funding sources carried tensions and uncertainties, which were not conducive to provision or development of services. The stigma attached to imprisonment extended to charitable organisations' willingness to fund work with prisoners' families, which impacts on service capacity. Lack of adequate funding perpetuated a dearth of services in some geographical areas. Strategies adopted to overcome funding difficulties had resulted in further vulnerabilities and potential distortions to services, and had stifled service development. The planned 'contestability' in provision foreshadows an extension of this pressure.
- Internally, services lacked sufficient expertise, especially in relation to the urgent and complex welfare and legal problems faced by the families and partners of prisoners, though Service B was, as a result of its origins, located in a larger organisation comprising on-site legal and welfare services.
- The capacity of the services to address long-term and widespread poverty and disadvantage was limited in various ways. The statutory service was constrained

in its scope and lacked information about its potential target group. Voluntary organisations were constrained by inadequate benefit levels and, in the case of foreign nationals, lack of recourse to all or some public funds.

- A service structure is developing in which families who are unable or unwilling to visit a prison will not have direct access to community-based support specifically oriented to the needs of prisoners' families. Should the NOMS framework hasten the demise of local community-based support, generic community organisations, Law Centres and welfare advice services will be the remaining points for referral. Stigma and fears among families associated with imprisonment make this an undesirable situation for prisoners' families. Systematic information concerning financial and welfare-related impacts of imprisonment policy for families will be unobtainable.

### **Evaluation of services to families and partners of prisoners**

The evaluation of the schemes (services specifically for prisoners' families) summarises the complex interrelationship between volume of service provided (outcomes) and the resource inputs (such as staffing, building, consumables, equipment). The evaluation therefore looked at the intensity of service-related activities (such as counselling, health promotion, drop-in) provided to family members and significant others – especially spouses, siblings and children – and also at the expenditure associated with the provision of these services. It did not seek to assess the financial viability of the schemes, but to cover financing arrangements, the cost of staffing and cost per unit of activity. Table 7 summarises the costs in relation to outcomes for each of the schemes.

### **Methodology**

Schemes were contacted and asked to provide income and expenditure information for the period 2003/04 and measures of outcome. Visits were made to some of the organisations and discussions were held to clarify the objectives of the organisation and information contained in the accounts. Measures of outcome were obtained through clarification of the objectives of the scheme and were analysed in terms of 'process outcomes' (Byford *et al.*, 2003). Defining outcomes in these terms allowed us to focus on the schemes' throughput and level of provision. The added advantage of using this concept is that outcomes are easily observable and measurable.



**Table 7 Expenditure and cost per unit of outcome by scheme**

Schemes	Total expenditure (£)	Contribution of the staffing cost (%)	Unit(s) of outcome	Cost per unit of outcome (£)
A	524,792*	87	Claim	27
			Processing claim	8
B	73,096	72	Person	914
C	141,790	62	Calls	–
			Families contacted (through befriending)	177
D	1,004,605	95 <sup>§</sup>	Call (national helpline)	9
			Call (local helpline)	6
E	113,446	85	Hour of contact (with generalist worker)	17
			Hour of contact (with advice worker)	20
			Visit (for children in play areas)	11
			Session (special visit, lasting five hours)	330
			Session (health information lasting one hour)	286
			Session (massage lasting 15 minutes)	6.25

\* This represents the total expenditure of the scheme and does not include the grant for visits of £1,822,499.

§ Includes small element of non-staffing costs for direct charitable work.

A mixture of approaches to the unit cost estimation was used depending on the information provided. Primarily, income and expenditure accounts were used to estimate the cost incurred in achieving outcomes of the scheme. Expenditure was then related to the provision of outcomes and a unit cost per outcome was derived. Where it was not possible to relate expenditure directly to outcome, we collected separate information on the costs associated with the provision of each measure, and a cost per outcome was derived from elements including salary and on-costs.

## Findings

### *Scheme A*

Assistance for visits includes an escort for people aged over 75 and in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA), travel, refreshment allowance, overnight accommodation and childcare. It was funded and administered by the prison service. The funding structure of this scheme differed from that of most organisations

identified in the research (as will be seen later) in that its funding was part of a global budget for staffing, travel, stationery and related costs of the unit as a whole.

The total annual cost of running the scheme of £524,792 covered salaries, including any allowances, non-pay running costs such as staff travel, subsistence, travel and office costs, and administrative receipts. During the study period, there were 67,140 applications for reimbursement. It is important to note that this reflects applications over the period and includes a percentage of rejected claims, which may be resubmitted for processing in the subsequent period. Processing claims could be difficult and time-consuming, involving administrative staff, caseworkers, data entry personnel and team leaders. It takes on average six to eight days to process each claim, at a cost per claim of £8.

The scheme received money specifically for visits through a grant. The grant covered not only the cost of visits but also bank charges, postage, local rate telephone calls and stationery-related expenses. The value of the grant for prison visits was £1,822,499, which translated into an average cost per claim of £27. This unit cost reflected the average reimbursement value of each claim that the scheme was financially able to cover over this period. Actual claims for prison visits were on average between £25 and £30. Comparisons with the unit cost of each claim suggest that the level of grant funding for reimbursement of claims was just about able to cover the value of each claim.

### *Scheme B*

As indicated above, Scheme B was part of the work of a larger charitable organisation. Funding for the scheme obtained by the parent organisation has been generated through fundraising, project development and contract delivery. Funding for the organisation as a whole came from a range of organisations including the prison service and financed a number of projects. Some of the projects had originally been set up in response to issues facing the local population.

The total amount spent over a year on family liaison<sup>4</sup> was £73,096 and represented 15 per cent of the cost of all activities undertaken by the charity. It covered items related to the salaries, office overheads, training-related expenditure, volunteer expenses, postage and stationery. Salaries accounted for 72 per cent of the overall expenditure. There was no dedicated worker supporting families, so staff and volunteers liaised with families where necessary. A zero cost was attached to volunteer time, since no details on volunteers were available. Nevertheless, the scheme covered volunteer expenses, which represented 2 per cent of the cost. Staff and volunteers worked with families for approximately 6.5 hours per week.



The scheme was undertaking ongoing case work with approximately 80 families over a 12-month period. The unit cost of the project was therefore estimated at £914 per person. This unit cost reflects the ability of the organisation to provide services for families. There were other needs, which were not being met given the available resources. This scheme has suggested a designated family support team would be useful to identify and meet the needs of families.

### *Scheme C*

While schemes A and B aimed to meet the needs of the families of prisoners, they also had as their remit services for prisoners and the wider community. Scheme C was one of two studied here whose main aim was to provide a service for partners, families and other close relatives or friends of people in prison. Funded through contributions from individuals, financial institutions, charitable organisations and the Government, nearly all of the work undertaken was in defined project areas. This facilitated monitoring and control of project-related expenditure. However, monitoring of outcomes was often time-consuming and not undertaken.

Total expenditure for the year was £141,790. The cost of project-related activities (£134,265) represented 95 per cent of this expenditure, while 5 per cent was related to management administration and expenses. Over this period, project-related activities had centred around visiting families in their homes or befriending them by phone, offering on-the-spot advice in seven crown courts, dealing with phone enquiries received through a national freephone service and programmes for families that offered practical advice on a range of issues including preparation for release of a loved one.

Project-related expenditure for the period of evaluation was reallocated based on details obtained for a subsequent period due to insufficient details of project-related expenditure for the evaluation period. The projects had remained the same over the two periods and there was no reason to believe that the allocations would change. Funding had been allocated evenly across projects over the period, with volunteer support receiving 9 per cent of expenditure. Over the year, it was estimated that the family centre contributed 22 per cent of the total cost. The family centre worker arranged socials and self-development workshops for women who came to the centre. During the period, 12 persons had regularly attended these sessions, in addition to the families who dropped in during the week.

Volunteers had played an invaluable part in this scheme. Expenditure on volunteer support was £12,761. Fifty volunteer befrienders were involved. Volunteers had

visited 60 families in their homes and befriended 12 families living outside through regular phone calls. The average cost per family of this befriending service was £177.

### *Scheme D*

Scheme D was run by a charity working with prisoners and their families – one of those whose role was educating the public on the effects of imprisonment on society. This was one of the larger schemes, providing a range of services through projects. Funding came from charitable trusts, parish appeals and the prison service, with grants and donations received for specific projects, which were susceptible to considerable fluctuations. For the financial year ended 2004, income from grants represented 69 per cent of total income. Expenditure of £1,004,605 covered staffing and non-staffing costs for charitable work (95 per cent of the costs) and staffing and non-staffing cost for general administration (5 per cent of the cost).

This scheme had a number of projects that catered to prisoners' families. During the period of evaluation, the scheme had witnessed the closure of accommodation support for families who needed a place to stay before the visit, described earlier in this chapter. However, families were still able to access advice either via a freephone number or at drop-in sessions. For the purpose of the evaluation, we looked at two of the projects for which data were available: family support through a local helpline run by the scheme and a national helpline – D(i) and D(ii), respectively.

Project D(i) provided telephone advice and support through a freephone service. A one-off cost of £1,098 had been incurred to get the helpline up and running, and the total annual cost of the helpline was £12,630. This helpline cost included salary expenditure, recruitment cost of staff and volunteers, training, travel of staff and volunteers, and running costs including telephone, postage and stationery. The helpline run by the scheme was one of two helplines included in the services to families. During this period, 2,262 family members had called for advice on issues related to the prison system, help with finance and emotional support. The cost per call to this service was estimated at £6 and is comparable with the average cost of a call for health-related advice to NHS Direct (a national helpline) of £15 per call (National Audit Office, 2002).

The second helpline run by this organisation – called D(ii) here – is part of a national consortium of five helplines, each taking calls from within their geographical region, collectively achieving national coverage. The helpline takes calls from anyone with a relative or friend in prison. Available data on the annual total expenditure of this part of the scheme was £14,150, with estimated unit costs of £9 per call. There

were 1,536 calls on a range of issues. Families expressed greatest concern on issues related to: housing; general mental health and more specific concerns such as suicide and self-harming; physical health care; financial help with prison visits; information on visits; benefits; contacting prisoners; and the prison system. Others called for emotional support.

### *Scheme E*

At the time of the evaluation, scheme E was in a period of transition, with new services coming on stream and others relocated from inside the prison to the Visitors' Centre. Therefore, unlike previous schemes, the evaluation covered a nine-month period.

This scheme has been funded through a variety of grants from eight main sources. The Big Lottery Fund (BLF) funds a large proportion (83 per cent) of the activities of the scheme. There are also contributions from some primary care trusts (PCTs), charitable organisations and the prison service. The funding structure of this organisation largely represents the multi-activity nature of the organisation and overarching nature of the work it does. Services are provided around themes that cover financial health, physical health, mental health and access to health and prison-related information. The scheme caters, not only to the families of inmates, but also to the staff and other persons in the wider community.

For all the other schemes, unit costs were estimated by dividing the amount of money spent by the volume of service outputs achieved, such as the number of families supported. There may be circumstances where a scheme has different objectives and expenditure cannot be related directly to the outputs delivered. This poses a challenge to estimating the unit cost and this was the case with scheme E.

The total amount spent over a nine-month period was £113,446 and covered items related to the day-to-day management and running costs including salaries, training-related expenditure, recruitment, provisions for the production of information and educational material, expenses related to sessional activities and externally provided services. For this level of expenditure, a number of outcomes were evident and the cost per activity is shown below. Before we look at this in detail, we need to consider the distribution of expenditure.

Salaries accounted for 85 per cent of overall expenditure, a pattern similar for most schemes in the evaluation. The salary costs covered eight core members of staff: a service development manager, senior family worker, two playworkers, a project

health information and development worker, project financial administrator, an advice worker and counsellor.

Funding for services, such as advice and counselling, provided by external organisations accounted for 37 per cent of the total cost. The services of the advice workers and counsellor were provided through Service Level Agreements (SLAs) under the theme of financial health and well-being, and were accessed via the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and a local church advice centre. Of the 575 enquiries or visits by the public, only 26 were by family members. They dropped in for advice on issues related to debt, civil employment rights, concerns for family well-being, independent advice on benefit issues, housing rights including homelessness, rent arrears, security of tenure and legal assistance provided by these external services. The cost per hour of contact between a family member and a generalist worker was £17 and £20 for each hour of contact made with the advice worker. Many advisers spent considerable amounts of time in follow-up work such as writing letters and making calls on clients' behalf. Though the follow-up, case-related work carried a cost, this was not included in the cost estimation. Anecdotal evidence suggests that at least as much time was spent on non-direct work, and it could be more, depending on the complexity of the case.

Where necessary, families were also referred to debt, employment, housing and welfare rights specialists. For this service and the others, the scheme was unaware of the degree to which these cases were resolved or questions adequately answered. This was because of the degree of complexity of some cases, which required more specialised services, and the practical issues in measuring the longer-term outcome. Nevertheless, without the scheme, it is doubtful whether these issues would have been dealt with, largely because of cost, and relatives of prisoners are often unwilling to use mainstream services because of the stigma attached to imprisonment.

Of all services, the most widely used was that of play areas for children. There were three visits a day lasting two-and-a-half hours in total. On average 922 children under the age of 16 accessed these play areas each month – ten children per visit. A family worker planned guided play opportunities for children visiting the prison; volunteers assisted from time to time. The cost per visit was £11, which is equivalent to £7 per hour. However, the service to the family was 'free' at the point of receipt, in that the £7 per hour was borne by the service.

The service manager, family workers and playworkers organised 'special visits' for families and inmates around family-oriented activities. During the nine-month period, 178 persons visited. There were on average three family members for each inmate who attended the five-hour session. The cost of staffing and providing food and entertainment for each session was £330. This represents a cost per hour of £66.

Over the nine-month period, the health information worker ran four health information sessions; each session, which lasted an hour, incurred expenses of £285. The hourly cost of the health information worker running these sessions, at a unit cost of £17, can be compared to the services in the NHS, where the unit cost of counselling services in primary medical care is £28 per hour (Curtis and Netten, 2005). Fifty-nine per cent of people (186) who attended the sessions were family members. Health information was freely available on subjects such as healthy eating, mental health services and child health. Health information was offered on a range of topics, with support and advice to families on issues ranging from prison systems to awareness sessions on drugs and alcohol. The health information worker led these sessions. Physical health services such as salsa and yoga were made available to families, although only massage services were accessed, at a cost of £6.25 per session.

## Summary

- A national consultation exercise led to five different schemes, considered to be promising or effective, being selected for economic evaluation. The evidence in this section shows that the schemes evaluated offered economic benefits to the family as well as generating savings to social care services.
- The costs of services to meet poverty and disadvantage were estimated and the results were indicative. Families were able to save £27 towards the cost of visits to see loved ones, in addition to the saving in childminding costs through provision of supervised play during visiting. A telephone advice service cost between £6 and £9 per hour, while advice from a generalist worker cost £17 per hour and from a specialist advice worker £20 per hour. A befriending service with ongoing support cost £177 per family and comprehensive ongoing family support cost £914 per person. These costs represent the ability of services to enable families to function, financially, socially and emotionally, during and after the crisis of imprisonment.
- Schemes provided much-needed health and social care, which may not have been accessed through mainstream services, thus bringing health and social care services directly to families who needed them. The diverse range of services that the schemes provide makes comparison difficult. No two schemes included in the evaluation offer exactly the same range of services. Nevertheless, for each service, we see the cost and the benefit, or gain, that may be obtained from a given budget.

- The evaluation also highlights the complex relationship between funding and service provision for prisoners' families and friends. Funding was often obtained from many sources to finance projects and was subject to fluctuation. This presented challenges to long-term planning and service provision. The services represented the funding available rather than the resources required to meet the needs of families.
- In some schemes, activities were undertaken on a project basis for which separate funding was obtained, while some other services were financed from general budgets. Projects whose funding was directly related to services provided a transparent basis on which to relate costs to benefits for users. However, greater monitoring of outcomes is required to elucidate this relationship.

# 4 Conclusions

## Introduction

There is nothing intrinsically different about these families that sets them apart. While every family is unique, on the whole, the families in this study are families like most others, adapting their lives, their reasoning, and their everyday behaviour to the social institutions that structure everyday life. The question that we have failed to ask in a meaningful way is how years of steadily rising criminal sanctions have shaped family life. (Braman, 2004, p. 95)

Imprisonment brings a multitude of challenges for families. This report has demonstrated the depth and scope of these challenges for families that face systematic impoverishment and disadvantage in the wake of a prison sentence. It has also tried to document the lived experiences of families and to understand their reasoning in traversing the chastening and unfriendly landscape of poverty in contemporary England and Wales. This sense of ordinary families facing extraordinary challenges has been a theme in our analysis.

Just as important is the awareness that criminal justice policy has been the instigator of increasing challenges for families and that the rising tide of imprisonment only promises more of the same.

The study has probed into the relevance of welfare services to these disrupted lives. Using the accounts of the families, it has sought to examine how sufficient and how effective the assistance from the broad statutory services has been. With limited assistance from such sources, the families fell back on a number of particular dedicated services, which provided some amelioration in a proportion of cases, depending significantly on the vagaries of local funding and initiative.

Above all, the report has attempted to show the importance of policy as a way of understanding the plight of families and the context in which they try to reconstruct their lives.

In these conclusions, we have the task of drawing together the findings and relating them to the policy agendas that surround these families. In particular, we will look at the criminal justice and welfare policy issues that are thrown into sharp relief by their experiences. Finally, the implications of the study for policy review and change are discussed.



## Criminal justice policy – the prisoner and the family

### Supporting the family – how imprisonment brings crisis and disruption

The impact of imprisonment and separation on families is clear in the evidence.

Imprisonment disrupts a household economy through a reduction in income – loss of the prisoner's income, exit from paid work to fulfil caring responsibilities, financial transitions – and new expenses associated with subsidising the imprisonment. We have estimated these costs on the basis of data from selected case studies and the findings are striking. Loss of a prisoner's or a partner's earnings averaged £6,204 over a six-month period, ranging between £6,332 and £15,600. Moreover, the average personal cost to the family and relatives was estimated at £1,050 over a six-month period, a monthly cost of £175. The full cost, however, per family over six months, including the cost to agencies and the cost of support provided by family and relatives, averaged £5,860. These findings are illustrative rather than conclusive. Nonetheless, they show the estimated costs that arose as a direct result of imprisonment, rather than exacerbation of an existing problem. Thus the estimated total cost of imprisonment would rise by 31 per cent if the costs to the family and wider society were included in the calculation. Moreover, costs of employment related to offenders have been highlighted in a recent review; these include costs of output lost, reductions in their lifetime earnings and employment-related adjustments (such as retraining) after release (Bowles and Praditpyo, 2005). Along with family costs, these must be added to so-called 'non-Exchequer' costs.

As outlined in Chapter 1, other studies have made similar findings, though in very different jurisdictions, concerning: increased financial hardship among prisoners' families (Braman, 2002); decline in family income following imprisonment because of the loss of both male and female prisoners' contributions to the family economy (Sharp and Marcus-Mendoza, 2001); and women caring for children leaving paid employment following a relative's imprisonment (Arditti *et al.*, 2003).

Nevertheless, criminal justice policy is increasing separation of offenders from their families and thereby reducing their support to children and families. There are no plans to substantially reduce the prison population. On the contrary, at the time of writing, there are plans to expand the prison estate (Home Office, 2006a). Despite the increased use of community penalties, tougher sentencing practices have led to an increase in numbers entering custody, the imposition of longer sentences and now, for *all* foreign nationals, a very strong prospect of the 'double sentence' of prison followed by deportation (Hearnden and Hough, 2004; Prison Reform Trust, 2004; see also Appendix 8 in this report).



### **Criminal justice, family ties and resettlement**

In the meantime, family ties have been identified in policy discussion as significant in reducing re-offending (SEU, 2002), and as having a positive impact for both prisoner and family, and it is policy that they should be promoted. Families are now also officially an instrument of a broader resettlement policy that is aimed at improving the social inclusion of offenders, enabling successful resettlement of prisoners on release (Home Office, 2004a, p. 37) and thus also minimising the risk of suicide in the most vulnerable period, the week following release (McTaggart, 2005).

Despite this focus on family ties and resettlement, the evidence of the study suggests that the scope for maintaining family relationships is very difficult to sustain for a number of reasons.

### **The threat to family and childhood development**

We have observed that imprisonment has a specifically disturbing effect that threatens family and childhood development. Psychological effects among adults, including depression and other psychological disorders, together with childhood behavioural disturbance have been widely discussed in the literature – the outcomes of which are costly. A considerable public and private cost is associated with treating illness linked to imprisonment. This may amount to £10,854 in a serious case (see Chapter 2, 'The economic impact of imprisonment for families and wider social costs').

A government minister has recently stated that there is no evidence of an intergenerational transmission of the risk of imprisonment (McTaggart, 2006). However, a recent report suggests that there is an impact of imprisonment for children that is both particular to this event and especially difficult for them in terms of the link between separation and identity (Murray and Farrington, 2005). Again, this impact is unacknowledged in policy pertaining to family ties, or indeed in suggested solutions to problems of visiting, such as video and email links.

Neither legislatively nor in policy is there consideration of how the needs of prisoners' children might be met for their own sake, outside the broader requirements of resettlement. With respect to maintenance of effective family ties, there is a clear disjuncture between existing policy that begins and ends with an insufficiently financed visiting scheme, and families' experience of visiting curtailed by inadequacy of income, distance and time. Further evidence of this inconsistency has been provided by an official report on a prison in Northern Ireland. Within Maghaberry prison, development and maintenance of family links has been described as 'an

important element of the work being done to help reduce re-offending' (Hansard, 2003). A recent report by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission into the conditions at Maghaberry states:

The right of women in prison and their children to a meaningful family life was not respected. Women were restricted to brief periods of unlock during which they could make telephone calls to their children. For nine days over Christmas women had no evening unlock.  
(Scraton and Moore, 2004, p. 12)

The interests of prisoners' children take a subordinate position to both judicial decision making and the statutory regimes governing penal institutions (Vogler, 1992). There is a move towards greater sensitivity to children's needs during visits, pushed forward by organisations representing prisoners' families. However, the policy framework is open to serious question.

Despite the acknowledged significance of family ties in *Reducing Re-offending* (Home Office, 2004a) and subsequent documents (e.g. West Midlands Region, 2004, p. 19), the commitment does not extend to enabling maintenance of family ties through removing the high marginal cost of visiting from families. Inadequate funding of the service that provides a contribution to the costs of visiting impedes service development.

Moreover, in the current policy environment, the potential for a healthily functioning family unit surviving and offering a positive environment for resettlement and/or for reducing self-inflicted death among ex-prisoners is minimal.

### **Results of increasing 'mass' imprisonment**

Due to the financial, social and emotional strain placed on families, a 'mass' imprisonment policy actively disrupts both immediate and extended family relationships, with ramifications for family and community. Braman (2004) concludes from his study in the United States that:

As the material costs of imprisonment accumulate, family members pull back from the relationships and norms that usually bind them together. Discussions of social capital usually describe it as promoting material well being, but public policy can invert the effect ... normally sustaining relationships can drain and exhaust the very families and communities they are thought to benefit most.  
(Braman, 2004, p. 162)

The social policy context relating to social care and welfare entitlements is different from the British case, in particular for prisoners on release. However, US and UK prisoners' families share similar strains imposed by imprisonment and, if policy moves further in the US direction, the same deterioration in family and community supports may be predicted.

### **Imprisonment, poverty and disadvantage: questions for wider social policy**

The study has tried to understand how families respond to the crisis of imprisonment, and to shine some light on the role of welfare services and policy in addressing the consequences of poverty and disadvantage experienced by families.

#### **Financial impact and welfare benefits**

Our findings bear out, yet again, imprisonment's profoundly disruptive effect on both the immediate and extended family incomes, which results in increased financial risk. The situation has not improved since Morris undertook her research in 1965:

... it is an incontrovertible fact that unless a wife regularly goes out to work and earns a reasonable wage, the financial position of the family deteriorates very considerably as the period of separation increases.  
(Morris, 1965, p. 207)

The financial impact for some families may be to reduce their incomes to the level of 'severe poverty' (that is, at or below 27 per cent of the median income),<sup>1</sup> which implies that disposable income falls below income support levels (Magadi and Middleton, 2005, p. 10). There were cases in the study that showed strong pressures from debts and outgoings, for example, where debt repayments to loan companies charging high rates of interest are made from benefit incomes (see Chapter 2, p. 22: 'Minimising expenditure and managing debt'). Potential factors in severe poverty may be deductions from benefits at source (Magadi and Middleton, 2005). Prisoners' families who fall into rent arrears or debt following the imprisonment, and meet repayments from benefits, may endure periods of severe poverty. Research into this area suggests that the risk of prisoners' children falling into this group is high. For example, Magadi and Middleton (2005, p. 65) found that:

... transitions in the main source of income between paid work and benefits, or movements between receipt and non-receipt of benefits were associated with increased persistent and severe poverty.

### **Gender, welfare and employment policy**

The families in the sample negotiated the crises of poverty in terms of prioritising care within the family. Social policy concerned with reducing poverty through a programme of 'welfare to work' is based on a two-adult household and, underlying this policy, is the assumption that decisions about paid work will be based on an economic rationality, that is, families will aim to maximise household income. The extent of official willingness to recognise changing family forms is questionable and Haney (2004, p. 339) has argued that it appears that, in practice, the welfare state continues to adhere to inflexible constructions of need.

Imprisonment strips an individual, namely the prisoner, of income-generating capacity and families claim state welfare as a replacement income. By removing one or more individuals from two-adult households, imprisonment increases economic risk, regardless of household structure. Such workless, single-adult households are prone to poverty and for lone parents, by extension, this includes their children. As the evidence of our sample confirmed, decision making about childcare and employment conforms to a recognised logic (Duncan *et al.*, 2003a, 2003b), which is not in line with the underlying policy assumption of economically rational decision making in relation to employment:

The assumption of a standard, individualised rationality runs against recent empirical research. This shows the importance of social ties and socially negotiated moral responsibilities in family life.

(Duncan and Irwin, 2004, p. 392)

Duncan *et al.* (2003b) have referred to these inconsistencies as the 'rationality mistake'. Our research identified a 'gendered moral rationality' (Duncan *et al.*, 2003b) underlying women's decision making in relation to employment. Lone, female-headed families of prisoners are therefore likely to prioritise the emotional and care needs of young children, and thus to rely on welfare benefits for their income.

We have shown also that, within prisoners' families, reliance on welfare benefits is related to structural barriers to work, which are similar to those faced by other lone-parent families who might fall into the bracket of 'hardest to help' (see Chapter 1, p. 6). In the context of imprisonment, recognised structural barriers to employment

are magnified within lone-parent/carer households of prisoners (detailed in the summary to Chapter 2, p. 30). Additional barriers to employment are also experienced, including housing disruption and deportation of the prisoner, relevant here to those women of British nationality eligible to join the New Deal, but partnered with foreign national prisoners who will be deported. The New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP), which has been identified as 'crucial in helping to tackle child poverty' more generally (HM Treasury, 2004b), appears, as we argued in Chapter 2, ill suited and therefore likely to be ineffective in relation to lone women (parents/carers) heading prisoners' families.<sup>2</sup>

### **Welfare benefit incomes and outcomes**

The sample were heavily reliant on welfare benefits, yet the inadequacy of welfare benefits as a source of income has been widely demonstrated (Bradshaw, 2004; Piachaud, 2005). Reliance on state benefits is at the root of the poverty found within prisoners' families.

... it is clear that the 'safety net' provided by the state is still far below its own poverty level. Indeed the relative levels of the safety net for most families remain lower in 2004/5 than in 1994/5. All that can be said about this fact is that this situation is inconsistent, indefensible and shameful. (Piachaud, 2005, p. 17)

Official evidence indicates that employability prospects are becoming worse for the poor as higher-level skills grow in demand (Learning and Skills Council, 2005). Two of the key groups in this study among whom labour market participation was low, in addition to older women, were lone parents and those (carers or otherwise) with disabilities. Bradshaw (2004) has argued that it is unlikely that the Government will achieve the employment targets it has set for lone parents and disabled people. He suggests that: "Welfare for those who can't" policies must play a more important part in the future strategy than they have in the past' (Bradshaw, 2004, p. 17) – that is, an effective and adequate safety net for children whose parents'/carers' work options are limited, or for whom work is not an option, is essential. This would rely on uprating benefits by an index of average net disposable income from earnings, after a basis of relativity has been established (Bradshaw, 2004, 20).

Reducing child poverty is a major target of policy and there has been some success in achieving reductions. However, given the impact of imprisonment on family incomes, children of prisoners must form a key part of that wider group at risk of poverty. In this context, the historical failure to record the names of prisoners' children

on admission seems a serious oversight that will only be addressed when the National Offender Management Information System (NOMIS) comes on stream.

In the meantime, Piachaud (2005, p. 18) argues, 'There is nothing inevitable about child poverty ... and the cost of the reduction to date has met with little complaint'. But:

That cost must also be compared with the far greater cost – in terms of childhoods diminished and lifetime prospects jeopardised – of failing to tackle child poverty. For each child brought up in poverty there is no second chance.

(Piachaud, 2005, p. 18)

### **Ethnicity, nationality and 'race'**

Historical social relations governing 'belonging' limit access to welfare. As the study indicates, families of foreign national prisoners, including some from black and ethnic minority groups, have their recourse to public funds limited as a condition of entry to the country. These are at risk of being profoundly impoverished, with associated disadvantage in terms of housing and health risks.

### **The politics of imprisonment and the fundamental policy dilemma**

Through removing wage earners from households and refusing to recognise this within criminal justice, welfare or immigration policies, the criminal justice system is responsible for impoverishing prisoners' immediate family, a process that is differentiated according to historical and contemporary structural factors of gender, race, disability and age. On the other side, however, there is a set of policies concerned with child development and poverty, with enabling families to maintain themselves in line with accepted standards.

The question to be answered is: how are the underlying assumptions embedded in the existing policy framework to be interpreted? Are there fundamental policy limitations in this field that will for the foreseeable future put a brake on reform?

Critics will argue that the lack of consideration of prisoners' families within welfare policy – or indeed with respect to the negative impact of criminal justice policy – is not 'accidental indifference'. For example, Smith (1986) has argued this is

an instrument re-enforcing the principle of deterrence. She also points to the link between a political agenda, which emphasises the prisoner as dangerous and threatening, and isolated from society, and the invisibility of their families at a policy level:

... it would be political suicide to build up one picture of crime and criminals to the voting public, instilling fear and prejudice, and presenting a law and order platform, and then contravene it by aiding prisoners' families.

(Smith, 1986)

The policy of increasing imprisonment – not to mention more stringent deportation policies for innocent families of foreign national prisoners – poses a dilemma in the current political climate. Can these trends be reconciled with benign welfare intentions or commitments?

Examples of these tensions are to be found in our study. The partial funding commitment to prison visiting reflects an implicit policy tension in providing direct support for prisoners' families. For a government that holds punishment of offenders in high esteem, and prisoners and families as responsible for their actions and those of their children (Home Office, 2004a, p. 7), allocation of increased or adequate funds to support very low-income households to maintain their relationships would raise questions about why they should receive this support.

This question is one we must address as we turn to flesh out the policy implications of the findings.

## **Policy implications of the research**

A clarification and review of the consequences of criminal justice policy for families appears to be necessary. The research has demonstrated the intolerable implications of criminal justice and social welfare policy as they combine to impoverish and disadvantage, and exclude, the relatives of those in prison – in particular prisoners' children. Given that these impacts are contrary to at least some stated policy intentions, the research indicates immediate action is required to protect the hidden, innocent victims of imprisonment.

The implications of our analyses of the disjuncture between policy assumptions and policy outcomes are suggestive of a review of the fundamental principles on which social welfare policy is based, rather than any rewriting of existing policy.



There are four fundamental themes that need to be given attention:

- rights and equality
- care principles
- public accounts reform
- community-based services.

### **Human rights, children's rights and equality considerations**

There are strong grounds for arguing that the current approach to prisoners' children in criminal justice policy does not conform to the requirements of either Article 3(1) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which states that the 'best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration', or Article 9(i) of the UNCRC, which provides for children to maintain contact with a parent from whom they are separated (Boswell, 2002). The Government's criminal justice policy also places it in a questionable position with respect to the European Commission on Human Rights (Article 8), which covers the right to respect for private and family life, except where interference is necessary for the prevention of disorder, crime and so on (Vogler, 1992). If properly embedded in the judicial and prison system, this provision could logically lead to imprisonment being curtailed unless shown to be necessary.

The Equality Act 2006 establishes the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) that will come into being in 2007. Section 3 of the Equality Act 2006 outlines the fundamental objectives of the CEHR, which in essence aim to ensure that all individuals are able to fulfil their potential and participate fully in society (HMSO, 2006). The impact of the Act with respect to prisoners and their families might depend on close monitoring for such groups, but, more fundamentally, on acknowledgement of the wider impact of imprisonment in policy circles.

Our findings suggest the need for greater understanding of the experiences of prejudice inherent in the second sentence of deportation, which will now subject *all* families of foreign national prisoners to an indefinite punishment for an offence – serious or not – they did not commit. In conflating immigration policy with criminal justice sanctions, innocent relatives are punished.



### **Introducing an 'ethic of care'**

Williams (2004, p. 84) introduces gender, care and diversity into the welfare debate. *Adequacy* of welfare should be combined with a radical repositioning of *care* in political thinking. This bears great relevance for prisoners' families. The 'ethic of work' that underlies the policy prescription of 'welfare to work' should be balanced with an 'ethic of care', which:

... recognises that care is universal and that it emphasises inter-dependency, acknowledges vulnerability and encourages trust and tolerance; these are important civic virtues that sustain social cohesion. An ethic of care rejects the inequalities and unwanted forms of dependency that arise from the devaluation of caring activities in society. (Williams, 2004, p. 84)

Reforming existing welfare policy may lead to an increase in the adequacy of state welfare benefits, but, unless fundamentally reshaped, the policy could continue to punish the virtue of 'care' extolled by predominantly female relatives of prisoners.

### **Public accounts reform**

The present structure of public accounts leads to misunderstandings about public expenditures by failing to cross-reference the impact of one budget on another. Thus it is possible for the imprisonment budget to be seen purely as expenditure on prisoners without accounting for the impact of imprisonment on families or for the possible subsidies to the prisons made by them. The impact of prison policies on individuals not connected with a budget is therefore not properly assessed. Nor is it easy to measure the full costs to the public purse of those policies. On the basis of case studies, we have made some illustrative calculations of the costs of imprisonment to agencies (NHS, social services) and to prisoners' families. They show some very high costs – calculated over six months, a social services intervention with one family cost £9,724. Families, whose benefit incomes no longer include the prisoner; provided financial support for the prisoner averaging £208 over six months, together with an average of £62 worth of clothing costs and an average of £388 in visiting costs over this period – expenditure that would not normally be associated with imprisonment.

As well as causing misunderstanding, this rigid and partial accounting reinforces constraints on expenditure by not allowing the impact of spending in one department on another to be acknowledged. So the gains from helping families are likely to be underestimated in the service-funding arrangements for schemes dedicated to prisoners' families.

### Community-based service provision

The findings suggest that the statutory sector contribution to travel funds for families requires, at the very minimum, urgent budgetary revision to enable adequate financing of travel and subsistence. Current methods of feedback do not uncover the limitations of the service as experienced by prisoners' families. Research to enable focused targeting of publicity is required and community-based organisations should play a role in research and delivery.

The capacity of voluntary sector services to meet the needs of prisoners' families is geographically inconsistent and internally lacking. This may act as a further impediment to what the Government will attempt to achieve through Children's Trusts. With respect to future provision of services, the picture is unclear. Our study of services found that the lack of service infrastructure means that it is not possible to evaluate policy effectively. Better public accounting structures and services would begin to indicate more clearly the effects of investment. Where services do exist, government policy, which involves NOMS moving away from locally accountable services to regionally based commissioning, will take services further from local communities, and they will therefore be less able to meet the specific advice, information and cultural needs of ethnically diverse prisoner family population.

Removed from their community base, services will be less attuned to new developments and problems in local communities that have implications for prisoners' families. Local community links are essential for the development among families' organisations of a strong civic voice, which currently voluntary organisations might claim to be, but lack the funding to undertake this effectively. A strong and well developed civic voice would provide a means of collective representation of issues concerning prisoners' families and a point of engagement with them in and through the communities from which they are drawn.

Within the services themselves, there may be an overall lack of professionalism because of lack of funding with which to employ staff or provide adequate training for voluntary staff. This financial instability is in part an outcome of a more widespread reluctance among funders to assist this group. With respect to their capacity to play an anti-poverty role, the impact of such services can only be marginal with respect to the acute and distinct needs of the families their services are designed to serve. Effective voluntary services would combine immediate legal and welfare-related advice and information with counselling, or referral for counselling, together with a focus on service development. Disadvantage could be more effectively addressed if the needs of minority groups were systematically incorporated into staff training and service development, creating a cultural sensitivity and enabling appropriate service provision in different contexts. Given the anticipated changes with respect to foreign

national prisoners, it is essential that existing support services review their remit with respect to their families.<sup>3</sup>

The fragility found among organisations and services supporting prisoners' families represents more than a crisis in funding. There is a need to have capacity to implement close engagement with prisoners' families and to implement more positive policies when/if these are established. The current network of services is inadequate, and a robust and more focused service structure is required to engage with families subject to the experience of imprisonment. The public policy case for investment in services for families has been given some acknowledgement by the Treasury, which in 2004 allocated £314,687 for a prison-led service in the South West (HM Treasury, 2004a). The justification, if one is needed, is that these are ordinary families, who have not been sentenced to imprisonment but to live with imprisonment. Thus they deserve the consideration and respect that a service framework with greater capacity, and that is better able to voice their needs, might offer.

Finally, it is imperative that we improve our understanding of the social and financial costs of imprisonment among groups not represented in this study, together with the communities from which families are predominantly drawn. Families of foreign nationals and asylum seekers who are imprisoned, families of political prisoners, those held under 'anti-terrorism' legislation, gypsies and travellers and same-sex couples are marginalised groups among whom further research would enable us to understand the tensions between the ways they – as marginalised groups – are 'represented' in legislation, policy, and debates about social cohesion and investment.

### **Overcoming the policy dilemma**

This research has shown that the poverty and disadvantage found among prisoners' families cannot be understood without examining state systems of welfare and punishment. 'Penal Welfarism' – a rehabilitative ideal that stressed the State's responsibility to address social problems (Haney, 2004, p. 335) – has been eclipsed by an ideological shift, 'the social and financial costs of which we are only just beginning to glimpse' (Garland, 2001, p. 2). This shift could be summarised as one in which the State moved from the 'social' treatment of poverty through the welfare state, to the 'penal' treatment of poverty and its correlates – 'race' being central in this debate (Waquant, 2001). Waquant's contribution would add weight to our argument concerning the absence of a civic voice among the families of prisoners. On this interpretation, imprisonment is a central tool of policy in neutralising any recalcitrant segments of the poor. The fortunes of prisoners' families weigh little in the balance.

Compared with this bleak punitive project, old-style penal welfarism sounds more attractive, but, as a project of a defunct – if benign – state elite, it lacks credibility. The findings of this report support a different conclusion. The true alternative to both of these is a political settlement based on principles of rights, an ethic of care, a transparent and public political economy, and the strengths of communities.

# Notes

## Executive summary

- 1 A recognised definition of poverty in Britain is to have a household income at 60 per cent or below the median income after housing costs (Piachaud, 2005, p. 6).

## Chapter 1

- 1 The employment rate among lone parents was 46 per cent in 1997 and had increased 8 per cent by 2003 to 54 per cent. The increase has slowed since 2003–04 (Labour Force Survey, 2006).
- 2 Weekly household incomes were skewed towards the lower end of the income scale – 34 of the households had a weekly household income of under £199 per week and 13 of the households had an income of less than £100 per week. This is in part a reflection of household size but also demonstrates levels of income support.

## Chapter 2

- 1 The overall figure in 1999 for first-time prisoners was one-third (Home Office, 1999, cited in SEU, 2002). However, given the sentencing trends outlined in Chapter 1, it may be that more than one-third of prisoners are serving their first custodial sentence. First-time prisoners are, however, over-represented in the study, which may imply more families were experiencing a period of adaptation to first-time imprisonment.
- 2 All names of interviewees have been changed to protect their identity.
- 3 Charges for calls to mobile phones were as high as 63 pence per minute. This is significant because families may not be able to afford the standing charges for land lines and may rely solely on mobile phones.
- 4 British Telecom (BT) won a ten-year contract with the prison service in 1998, and installed a PIN phone system in prisons (see Action for Prisoners' Families, 2005). One MP has called for the call charges to be reduced to the equivalent costs of calls from a phone box (Battle, 2006).

- 5 A discussion of the significance of social work in the underlying processes of racial formation and in monitoring families constituted as deviant or dysfunctional is beyond the scope of this report. (For an analysis see Lewis, 2000, especially pp. 28–33, 202–6).
- 6 This experience of 'race' needs to be understood through an ensemble of historical, social, cultural and economic relations (Hall *et al.*, 1978, p. 383).
- 7 Questions about social isolation were derived from Gordon and Townsend (2000).
- 8 Not all those who completed the questionnaire completed this question; also, some telephone interviewees did not return the questionnaire. The cases of non-respondents were checked for any systematic difference. There was nothing to mark them out in relation to sentence length, recidivism or method of recruitment.
- 9 An eclectic theoretical model has been developed from various psychological theories to enable understanding of the impact of imprisonment on children's development and well-being (Parke and Clarke Stewart, 2003, pp. 193–204).
- 10 See Phillips and Bloom (2001, pp. 66–71) for discussion of caregivers' access to financial assistance in the US.

### Chapter 3

- 1 This is significant in relation to the needs of black prisoners' families, which cannot be divorced from personal or community experiences of the criminal justice and welfare systems. In the case of organisation B, for instance, the ethos of the organisation is historically defined as part of the community experience, and it was originally entirely run by volunteers.
- 2 This particular project was developed from a parent in the church community visiting a relative on remand and seeing other young black people who were not receiving visitors. The focus of the scheme is on family liaison.
- 3 Information is available in foreign languages on request, but there is no information available concerning, for instance, routes of access to the scheme by service users who do not speak English.
- 4 Family liaison included over 170 referrals who were supported over the phone or allocated to a volunteer, as well as ongoing telephone support for families and supervision of volunteers.

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## Chapter 4

- 1 See Magadi and Middleton (2005) for a discussion of this definition of 'severe poverty'.
- 2 The principle of requiring lone-parent families to be in paid work as a condition of receiving benefit has not yet been ruled out, but this has raised objections (see Select Committee on Work and Pensions, 2003/04).
- 3 Though a prisoner might usually be defined as anyone held in detention, there seems to be a distinction made by some organisations supporting prisoners' families (APF personal communication, 2006) between those prisoners sentenced to punishment or awaiting trial, and those held under immigration legislation. Imprisonment may involve both criminality and immigration elements. As foreign nationals sentenced to custody are more than likely to face deportation orders earlier in their sentences and are becoming an increasingly large group among the prison population, the needs of families will become more apparent.

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# Appendix 1: Screening document

This was completed by the interviewer.

## Screening ‘families’/‘partners’

### i) Does the person you have come to see normally live with you?

Yes

No

Sometimes

Has done and will do

Has done but will not do in the future

### ii) Is the individual you have come to see:

sentenced

on remand

don't know.

### iii) What is your relationship to the person you have come to see?

*Point out that we recognise there are many people who regard children for instance who live with them as their children, though they may be members of what we would regard as extended family. We take an inclusive definition.*

#### a) Family relationship

biological parent

biological child

aunt/uncle

grandparent/grandchild

children

informal/family foster carer

*b) personal relationships*

married

partner (living together for six months or more)

**iv) Financial relationship**

Is your income shared between everyone, or do you and your partner/relative in prison keep your income(s) and/or financial affairs completely separate?

Share incomes

Share some income

Separate incomes and finances/Other

**Screening (financial)**

The study is focusing on people who fall within the lower-income groups. The first thing that we need to do is to make sure – we hope without being too intrusive – that your income is within the right range for us to ask you to take part in the study.

Has your housing/accommodation been adversely affected as a result of your partner or relative being imprisoned?

Yes/No

If yes, are you:

a) threatened with eviction?

b) have you been evicted?

c) have you been evicted as a direct consequence of a previous sentence?

Are you currently employed?

Yes/No

Part-time

Intermittently

If you do work, or if you are working now, what is your usual occupation?  
(e.g. building, sales, driving)

Are you receiving income support at the moment?

Yes

No

No – lost it because relative/partner gone into prison



## Card 1

We are interested in talking to people who are in lower-income groups.

Please state which of the income bands your *weekly household income* falls within.

If you are employed, this refers to weekly income *after tax* and all deductions.

By household income we mean *before* any household expenses such as rent, bills, Council Tax, etc. are paid.

Please *exclude* Housing Benefit and Council Tax benefits.

- A £51–£100
- B £101–£199
- C £200 –£299
- D £300 and above

**Card 2**

We need to gather some information about household structure.

Please state how many adults live in your household at the moment:

Please state how many children live with you at the moment:

# Appendix 2: Self-completed questionnaire

This was either given to interviewees to complete or was sent to them by telephone or mobile phone.

## Card 1

How many times has your relative or partner been in prison?

- A This is the first time
- B Once before
- C 3–5 times
- E 5–10 times
- F 11–15 times
- G 15–20 times
- H 20–30 times
- I Too many to remember
- J Don't know

## Card 2

We would like to know about whether you own your own home or not.

This is because we would like to find out whether imprisonment of a family member has an effect on housing and standards of living.

Please tell me which letter corresponds to your situation at this moment in time.

Do you currently:

- A Own your home outright
- B Rent your home
- C Pay towards a mortgage
- D Live in a home rent-free (e.g. with friends, parents, other relatives)

### Card 3

Do you have any of the following problems with your current accommodation?  
(Please ring all that apply)

- A Shortage of space
- B Too dark
- C Lack of adequate heating facilities
- D Leaky roof
- E Damp walls, floors, and/or foundation(s)
- F Other
- G None of these problems with accommodation

### Part 2

Has your health, or the health of the family, been made worse by the housing situation?

- A Yes
- B No

## Card 4

### General health questions

Please read this carefully:

We would like to know if you have had any medical complaints and how your health has been in general, over the past few weeks.

Please answer all the questions by underlining the answer you think most applies to you.

Have you recently ...

<b>1</b>	<b>Been able to concentrate on whatever you are doing?</b>	Better than usual	Same as usual	Less than usual	Much less than usual
<b>2</b>	<b>Lost much sleep over worry?</b>	Not at all	No more than usual	Rather more than usual	Much more than usual
<b>3</b>	<b>Felt you are playing a useful part in things?</b>	More so than usual	Same as usual	Less than usual	Much less useful
<b>4</b>	<b>Felt capable of making decisions about things?</b>	More so than usual	Same as usual	Less than usual	Much less capable
<b>5</b>	<b>Felt constantly under strain?</b>	Not at all	No more than usual	Rather more than usual	Much more than usual
<b>6</b>	<b>Felt you couldn't overcome your difficulties?</b>	Not at all	No more than usual	Rather more than usual	Much more than usual
<b>7</b>	<b>Been able to overcome your normal day-to-day activities?</b>	More so than usual	Same as usual	Less than usual	Much less usual
<b>8</b>	<b>Been able to face up to your problems?</b>	More so than usual	Same as usual	Less than usual	Much less than usual
<b>9</b>	<b>Been feeling unhappy and depressed?</b>	Not at all	No more than usual	Rather more than usual	Much more than usual
<b>10</b>	<b>Been losing confidence in yourself?</b>	Not at all	No more than usual	Rather more than usual	Much more than usual
<b>11</b>	<b>Been thinking of yourself as a useless person?</b>	Not at all	No more than usual	Rather more than usual	Much more than usual
<b>12</b>	<b>Been feeling reasonably happy, all things considered?</b>	More so than usual	Same as usual	Less than usual	Much less than usual

## Card 5

If your income has changed since the family member went to prison, how much has it has changed?

Please tell me which letter most closely relates to your change in income:

- A Less than £50
- B Between £51–£100
- C Between £101–£200
- D Between £200–£300
- E More than £300



## Card 6

Could you tell me whether the main cause for this change in income was due to:  
(Please ring all that apply)

- A Job loss as a result of incarceration of a family member
- B Job loss because of other family commitments
- C Job loss for other reasons (e.g. redundancy)
- D Changed jobs
- E Retirement
- F Promotion
- G Pay rise
- H Benefit disruption
- I Other reasons

## Card 7

We would like to try to get a general feeling of the impact of someone going to prison. Have there been times in the past when you have felt isolated and cut off from society for any of the reasons below? (Please ring all that apply)

- A Paid work
- B Childcare responsibilities
- C Other caring responsibilities
- D Lack of transport
- E No friends
- F Problems with physical access
- G Sexism
- H Racism
- I Other
- J None of these

## Card 8

I am going to describe three situations where people might need help. For each one, could you tell me if there is anyone you could ask for help? (Please include people living with you and people outside the household)

### 1 Ill in bed

You are ill in bed and need help at home. Is there anyone you could ask for help? (Help at home means help with domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning and making a cup of tea.)

Yes/No

### 2 Money

You are in financial difficulty and need to borrow some money to see you through the next few days. Is there anyone you could ask for help?

Yes/No

(Loans from banks or other financial institutions should be excluded.)

### 3 Crisis

If you had a serious personal crisis, how many people, if any, do you feel you could turn to for comfort and support? (If you are not sure of an exact number, please give an estimate.)

## Appendix 3: Additional details about the interviewees' social situation

Additional information gathered through the questionnaire cited in Appendix 2.

### Housing situation at the time of interview (*n* = 37)

Home owner	3
Rent home	26
Pay mortgage	4
Live rent-free	4

### Impact of imprisonment on housing

Some impact on housing	21
Impact due to financial problems	7
Impact due to threats to life	2

### Result of impact

Lost homes	4
Moved (unable to cope)	2*
Children moved in	5
Moved to foster care	1

\* 1 due to mental health problems, 1 due to physical disability.

## Disability and ill health (*n* = 20)

Twenty-nine per cent of the 20 respondents considered that the imprisonment had adversely affected their own or their families' health.

Total describing a disability	20
Full-time carer of disabled interviewee in prison	3 (1 with physical disabilities, parenting 2 children)
Range of problems	
Seriously mentally ill (SMI) and/or under the care of NHS psychiatric services	4
Mobility problems	6
Learning difficulties	1
Eating disorder	2
'Other'(including; asthma, arthritis, Crohn's disease, multiple sclerosis)	8

## Appendix 4: Implications of the recruitment method

Recruitment through *Visitor Centres* (VCs) was undertaken with sensitivity to the fact that visiting is fraught with anxieties and families often face time constraints. Some visitors regard VCs as ‘prison property’. Apprehension towards the research was palpable, in particular among visitors from minority ethnic groups. A typical response was ‘I’ll talk to you when he comes out’. Visitors would discuss the impact of imprisonment on themselves and extended family, sometimes overseas, but refused to be interviewed. Experiences of the criminal justice system (CJS), both prior to and during the imprisonment, may explain why some groups were more reluctant than others to be available for interview.

Families were also recruited through *support organisations*. While this potentially reduces anxieties associated with participating, this method of recruitment may introduce sample bias. However, the recruitment screening process ensured a sample, not of those attending organisations, but of those whose incomes were at or below 60 per cent of the median. None of those recruited through organisations had received support from the outset and so interviewees were able to reflect on their situation prior to receiving support. Levels of support varied and had little impact on their material conditions. This method also recruited individuals who did not visit or visited infrequently.

Recruitment through support organisations increased both geographical spread and the ethnic diversity of the families interviewed. One interview was conducted through an interpreter.

The composition of the sample is weighted towards the older age group, a reflection of the fact that almost 30 per cent of the interviewees were prisoners’ parents or partners with children. The expectation would be that this might increase the levels of ill-health or difficulties with visiting, but this was only found in one case in the 51+ age group. The levels of disability associated with this age group may also be disproportionate, but the reported disability was not at a higher level than that of the younger (31–40 years) age group.

The sample was predominantly female, which increased the proportion of women caring for prisoners’ children. Rather than distorting the findings, the female bias reflected existing literature, which suggests that children of male prisoners are cared for by female relatives (21 of the interviewees were lone parents or grandparents) but those of women prisoners are more likely to be taken into care (Johnston, 1995).

The prisoners were characteristically serving long sentences, which may have had an impact on findings to do with financial and housing difficulties. However, 50 per cent of the prisoners had been imprisoned for a year or less, so this was not considered to distort the sample unduly, particularly in view of the fact that, because of the current numbers in prison, prisoners are more often accommodated outside their local area.

A screening question asked participants to state their weekly household income – after tax – before housing costs, but excluding Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit. The flexibility allowed in this strategy was as follows: individuals were interviewed if welfare benefits had been their sole source of income since the imprisonment and whilst higher rates of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Incapacity Benefit may take claimants over the poverty threshold, this was only the case in two borderline households; two interviewees had managed to claim additional benefits since the imprisonment, but discussed their experiences living on basic Income Support; and two interviewees fell outside the definition of ‘poor’ and were interviewed specifically to explore issues of the threat of financial impact to housing and/or employment.

# Appendix 5: Welfare benefits, eligibility and rates

Benefit	Eligibility	Rates (basic*)
Income Support	For people from 16 years up to age 60 on a low income.	£45.50 (under 25 years) and £57.45 (over 25 years). Family premium £16.25.
Job Seeker's Allowance	For people of working age who are out of work or working less than 16 hours a week, available for and actively seeking work.	JSA is £45.50 (under 25 years) and £57.45 (over 25 years).
Child Benefit	A benefit for people bringing up children aged under 16 or in full-time education. It is paid for each child and is not affected by income or savings.	
Child Tax Credit (CTC)	A means-tested allowance** available to families responsible for at least one child under 16 or young person in full-time education, or who is undertaking unpaid training on a specified programme. The claimant must be the main person responsible for the child.	
Working Tax Credit (WTC)	WTCs are based on household circumstances, including those listed above (see CTC), other benefits received and weekly childcare costs. WTC is available to those who are aged 16 or over, work 16 hours or more a week, are on a low income and are responsible for a child.	The maximum basic WTC (2006/07) is £1,665. Second adult element = £1,640; lone-parent element = £1,640 per annum; up to 80 per cent of childcare costs (maximum £300) per week for two children.
Housing Benefit	Housing Benefit helps people on low incomes pay their rent. It is means-tested**. Those who live with relatives, who are full-time students or who are seeking asylum are not eligible.	
Disability Living Allowance (DLA)	Tax-free, available to children or adults who need help with personal care or who have mobility or care needs because of disability. Rates depending on the level and impact of disability.	£16.50 basic per week. Over £100 per week high care needs and mobility support.
Incapacity Benefit	A weekly payment for people under State Pension age who are too ill to work because of sickness or disability for at least 28 weeks.	Weekly rate £59.20, rising to £78.50 after 53 weeks.
Crisis Loan	An interest-free loan from the Social Fund, which is repayable from income or benefits, paid to applicants who do not have enough money to meet immediate short-term needs because of an event or disaster.	

DWP, 2006b.

\*\* A means test is an examination of somebody's income and savings, carried out to determine whether the criteria for a benefit or financial aid are met.



# **Appendix 6: National consultation exercise to collect nominations for services for inclusion in the economic survey**

The national consultation departed from the original research proposal, in which the objective was to map services for prisoners' families nationally. During the course of the research it became clear that service provision nationally is, at best, patchy and, at worst, parts of the country are devoid of local services for prisoners' families (Whitehouse, 2004). A national consultation to illuminate appropriate, innovative and effective services was therefore felt to be more useful in identifying services for inclusion in the economic survey. Notes on the conduct of the survey are presented below.

## **The survey**

### **Stage 1: national consultation**

Individual 'experts', Regional Government Offices, Job Centre Plus co-ordinators and voluntary sector regional representatives were contacted to nominate services for inclusion in the survey. The letter and questionnaire distributed are shown in Appendix 7.

### **Stage 2: selection of services for inclusion in the study undertaken**

Criteria for selection:

- validity: the potential economic benefit for prisoners' families
- relevance: prisoners' families may receive a service but may not be the target group
- duration: how long the service had been in existence and whether we were able to make an economic assessment of it

- point in the sentence at which the service is provided
- innovation: whether the service demonstrated innovative ways of addressing poverty and disadvantage
- multiple nominations
- prisoners' families must be distinguishable from other service users (e.g. prisoners) to facilitate the economic costing element of the survey.

### **Stage 3: five services surveyed**

Staff and users interviewed or service users' views were drawn from in-depth interviews if not available. No volunteers available. Time constraints prevented follow-up. Documentary evidence including annual reports, statements of policy, written accounts, etc. was also gathered.

# Appendix 7: Letter and questionnaire to elicit nominations of services for inclusion in the economic survey

Dear

**Re: 'Poverty and disadvantage among prisoners' families and partners – what services are effective and appropriate?'**

We are a research team working at The Centre for Crime and Justice Studies and the Institute of Psychiatry, all based within King's College London, and we are contacting you in relation to the above research. This has been funded by The Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The research aims to explore the economic, social and emotional impact of imprisonment, for the families and partners of prisoners. By contacting a range of knowledgeable people, we are seeking to identify services that address poverty and disadvantage in prisoners' families. We would like to study examples of services that in your opinion are effective and appropriate to the needs of such a group.

- Attached is a *brief* questionnaire, seeking your valuable opinion on existing services for prisoners' families. We would be very grateful if you would fill it in, in complete confidence.
- Important: We are interested in those services, which can demonstrate that they provide services to prisoners' families and partners. This may be either because they target that group or because the group is one among a number of groups that receive help. However, we have included a question (question 2) which allows you to nominate services that you feel are effective and appropriate to this group but perhaps may not be able to demonstrate their help to this specific group.
- Please do not restrict your answers to your own service(s). We are seeking to identify as *broad a range of services* as possible including, for instance, those offering debt/or benefit advice, housing advice, employment gateways, shared resources (e.g. shared transport, toy libraries, etc.)
- We would be grateful if you would kindly complete this and return it by email *within the next four working days*, to the project team.
- If we do not receive your nominations within this period, important services that you are aware of may not be included in the survey. It is also in the

interests of prisoners' families that effective and appropriate services are identified.

- If you have *any questions* about the information we are requesting, or the research, please do not hesitate to contact a member of the research team on the numbers below.

Thank you!

On behalf of the research team:  
Roger Grimshaw, Centre for Crime and Justice Studies

### Question 1

Below, we would like you to nominate, and to provide the details of, up to three services. Please remember these must provide a demonstrable service(s) for prisoners' families and/or partners. The pro forma indicates the details of the service that we would like you to give.

We would very much value your opinion as to which services provide an effective, as well as appropriate and acceptable, service to prisoner's families and/or partners.

If you have any queries about the information requested, please do not hesitate to contact us, on 0207 848 1613/1616

The Research Team:

Roger Grimshaw (Research Director)	0207 848 1616
Rose Smith (Researcher)	0207 848 1613
Renee Romeo (Researcher)	0207 848 0588

FAX	0207 848 1689
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**Service 1 (repeated for service 2 and 3)**

1 Service name

2 Organisation providing the service(s)

3 Please outline the service or specific service function which you consider to be effective and appropriate:

4 Why do you consider this service/service function to be effective and appropriate?

5 Which agency funds the service? Please place a cross X next to the relevant funding source:

Prison Service	
Probation Service	
Home Office	
DWP	
DoE	
Community Fund	
Local authority	
Charitable grant(s)	
Other (please name below)	

**Question 2**

Are there any other services that are catering to the needs of prisoners' families and partners but may not be able to demonstrate their role with that specific group? What are these?

**Question 3**

What changes, if any, would you like to see in the provision of services to address poverty and disadvantage in prisoners' families?

Any other comments?

Thank you!

Please save this document and rename it before emailing to the return address, or FAX 0207 848 1689.

## Appendix 8: The 1971 Immigration Act and access to state welfare

The key Act that outlines the main exclusions to welfare entitlement is the 1971 Immigration Act, which focused on the admission and maintenance of dependants. Of relevance also is the 1981 Nationality Act, which removed the right to British citizenship by virtue of being born in Britain. These Acts have had the 'knock-on' effect of excluding people from access to welfare services and benefits through the requirement not to have recourse to public funds (Lewis, 2000, pp. 101–2).

Recent changes concerning eligibility for state support, of relevance to families of prisoners, are the May 2005 change from a requirement to be 'habitually resident' to a requirement to have the 'right to reside'. Changes are outlined in the Income Support (Regulation 21.3) and Job Seeker's Allowance Regulations (Regulation 85). The situation is often hypothetical because, unless indefinite leave to remain has been granted, a non-British national will have a passport stamp stating they cannot have recourse to public funds. There may be some local authorities where hardship funds may be available.

### Deportation of foreign national prisoners

At the time of writing, the position with respect to foreign national prisoners is changing, but currently it can be summarised as follows. A recommendation to deport a non-British citizen could be made under the 1971 Immigration Act, s.3(6),(8). The criteria on which recommendations depended included, for instance, the seriousness of the offence and offending history, whether the offender's continued residence in Britain was likely to be to the detriment of the society, whether a mental illness was likely to result in violence, etc. (Sentencing Advisory Panel, 2005, p. 9). Under Section 6 (article 8) of the Human Rights Act, (1998):

... the court needs to balance the gravity of the offence and the future risk of re-offending, against the strength of the offender's family ties in this country and in the country to which he or she is liable to be deported.  
(Sentencing Advisory Panel, 2005, p. 14)

The Court of Appeal has quashed recommendations for deportation (*R v. Harris*, EWCA Crim. 137, quoted in Sentencing Advisory Panel, 2005, p. 14) on the basis of Human Rights legislation.

However, at the time of writing, the legislation with respect to foreign nationals is expected to change. The former Home Secretary, Charles Clarke, updated the Government's position on foreign national prisoners in a statement made to the House of Commons on 3 May 2006, in which he stated that:

... where deportation can properly be considered, the *clear presumption should be that deportation will follow unless there are special circumstances why it cannot.*

(Clarke, 2006, emphasis added)

The new Home Secretary, John Reid, made a written statement to the House of Commons in which he outlined his priorities in relation to foreign national prisoners (Reid, 2006). These eight priorities outline his actions in the absence of new legislation with respect to deportation. In his statement, he reported that he had ordered 'all decisions on deportation' to be made 'according to the most robust interpretation of the requirements of our international obligations', that he had demanded enhanced arrangements to facilitate the return of prisoners earlier in their sentence and that the guidance given to caseworkers in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate would be tightened. Referring to Rule 364 of the Immigration Rules, which set out the criteria against which a crime should be balanced in the decision as to whether to deport, Reid stated that the criteria dated back to 1994 and should be tightened:

It is not right that the system should tilt the exercise of discretion in favour of the criminal rather than public safety.

(Reid, 2006, p. 4)

In essence, the thrust of the statement is that foreign national prisoners will be likely to be deported. The implications for families of foreign national prisoners are that they are more likely, unless they are able to return to the place to which their relative or partner is deported, to be separated on a long-term basis.