Ministry of Justice

Intergenerational offending

A narrative review of the literature

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1. Summary

This report reviews key research on intergenerational offending, defined as the observed phenomenon whereby children with a parent or parents who offend, go on to offend themselves. It focuses on questions such as whether any differences between maternal and paternal offending exist, differential impacts according to the child's gender, and evidence of interventions to reduce intergenerational offending.

Key findings are:

- There is a strong correlation between parental offending and child offending, established across numerous longitudinal studies across different jurisdictions.
- There is clear evidence to suggest that children with a parent in prison are at risk of poor outcomes (in terms of mental health, behaviour, wellbeing etc.). However, the extent to which parental imprisonment is a specific cause of these poorer outcomes is unclear (i.e., poor outcomes may result from other factors such as socio-economic disadvantage).
- There are complex reasons why children with an offending parent are at higher risk of offending. These encompass both intrafamilial (e.g. parental supervision of the child, addiction) and socio-economic (e.g., economic deprivation) factors, meaning a multi-faceted approach is needed.
- Recent research has found the effect of parental offending on children differs according to the gender of parents and children. Having a convicted mother was linked to an increased risk of a daughter offending, but having a convicted father was not linked to an increased risk of the daughter offending. However, the number of girls who offend is generally small, which might explain this finding, as noted by the authors. There was a strong link between having a convicted father and boys' offending, and the same trend in the context of boys and convicted mothers. However, in-depth analysis suggests a direct link between fathers' offending and their sons' offending, whereas the link between mothers and sons is not direct and is instead mediated via factors such as the father's drug-taking.

- Longer periods of parental imprisonment are associated with an increased risk of the child offending.
- Type of offence is an additional factor. The children of people who commit violent offences are more likely to commit violent offences also.
- There are very few external evaluations of interventions aimed at reducing intergenerational offending. Equally, there appears to be very few interventions that explicitly state that an aim of the intervention is to reduce intergenerational offending.
- Several protective factors exist which are linked to improved child outcomes. For example, the resident carer coping well is one such factor, as is the child's mental wellbeing and having a forum in which they can express their needs and emotions.

2. Background

Intergenerational transmission refers to the transfer of certain features, traits, behaviours and/or outcomes from the parent to the child (Lochner, 2008). In this context, there is understandable policy interest in how and why children of parents who offend are more likely to go on to offend themselves. This paper can be read alongside the following publication: Estimates of children with a parent in prison (Official Statistics).[1]

Firstly, it is useful to set out the scale of the issues. It has previously been found that 63% of sons of men in prison went on to offend (Farrington, Barnes and Lamber 1996).[2] More recently, it has been found that children of people who offend have a 2.4 times higher risk of offending compared to children of parents who did not offend (Besemer et al. 2017), and the longitudinal Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development puts the risk at 2.50 to 2.97 times higher (e.g., Farrington et al. 2015). The intergenerational effect of offending has also been found outside of the United Kingdom (UK), for example, in longitudinal Dutch studies (e.g., Bijeveld and Wijkman, 2009). To place evidence on intergenerational offending into context, the protective nature of family relationships is also recognised. In the UK, Lord Farmer has recently produced highly regarded reports (Farmer 2017, Farmer 2019) on the importance of family ties for men and women in prison.

In this review of the existing research, several pertinent questions are covered:

1. What proportion of children with a parent in prison go on to offend?
2. What research exists on the reasons why children with a parent in prison go on to offend?
3. Does the risk of offending vary by the gender of the offending parent and of the child, timing of parental offending, and type of offences the parent commits?
4. What is the impact of parental imprisonment on children?
5. What interventions exist to reduce intergenerational offending?

[1] Estimates of children with a parent in prison - GOV.UK

[2] The main limitation of using this estimate from the Cambridge Study is the small number of boys with imprisoned parents within the study sample

3. Methodology

This research overview is not intended to be a formal systematic review due to the number of questions raised. A systematic review focuses on one question in great depth and was thus not a suitable approach to take here. Instead, a narrative review approach was used. Primarily academic, peer-reviewed research was drawn upon. The scope was global, but all research needed to be published in English. Google Scholar and Findit@bham were used to source published academic research using key words/phrases, including 'intergenerational offending', 'offending transmission', and 'intergenerational crime'. A total of 44 papers have been reviewed covering a mix of methodologies including eight systematic reviews and three longitudinal studies. Date of publication for the papers included range from 1988 to 2023. Older publications include some of the longitudinal studies, however caution should be applied where older data is drawn upon.

Findings of some of the more methodologically robust studies (e.g., larger samples, longitudinal and including a control group) are discussed in detail in this report. Smaller qualitative studies were also included for tentative insights, with limitations acknowledged. Some grey literature (e.g., research conducted by charities) was drawn upon to supplement academic research, but this needs to be approached with the caveat that such research is not peer-reviewed academic research. April 2023 was used as a cut-off date, and therefore any articles/reports published after that date have not been included. Genetic theories seeking to explain intergenerational offending are out of scope.

This review focuses on studies of offending parents and effects of parental offending on their children. General offending is covered; child neglect/abuse is out of scope for this review. However, it is acknowledged that, for many offenders, there can be a generational 'cycle of violence', whereby the offending parent is both victim and perpetrator.

A limitation of this review is that (like many other studies/reviews of research with offenders) it draws on known offending records. A further limitation of this review is that it has not drawn a consistent/clear distinction between the children of convicted parents who

receive a community sentence and the children of imprisoned parents. However, having an imprisoned parent may well generate an additional set of risks.

4. Existing research

4.1 Does the risk of offending vary by the gender of the offending parent, timing of parental offending, and type of offences the parent commits?

Males and females have different patterns/trends in terms of offending. For example, the number of crimes perpetrated by males far exceeds that of females. There are differences by gender in terms of the types of crimes committed, as well as evidence of differences in pathways into offending for girls as compared to boys (Auty, Farrington and Coid, 2017). Given these differences, it is relevant to explore whether having a mother or a father offend impacts children differently. For the purposes of this research summary, the focus is on the parent-child relationship. However, there is a separate question of scope and whether intergenerational offending should extend to include older/younger siblings, adopted children, grandchildren etc.

Some research has found greater continuity of criminal behaviour between fathers and sons (e.g., Thornberry et al 2003, Goodwin and Davies 2011). In fact, most of the research has focused on paternal offending, perhaps because there are comparatively fewer women convicted of criminal activities. Farrington et al. (2009), drawing on the only UK-based large-scale, longitudinal study of intergenerational offending (Cambridge Study of Delinquent Behaviour) found evidence of transmission between fathers and sons, but less so between mothers and daughters. Drawing on the same study but using more recent data, Auty, Farrington and Coid (2017) analysed the mother vs father issue in greater depth. They found high odds for intergenerational offending amongst parents and children who were the same gender. A convicted mother considerably increased the likelihood that her female child would be convicted with Odds Ratio[3] (OR) 5.16, but the odds of a convicted father having a convicted daughter was not statistically significant (likely because of the small number of convicted daughters in the sample). There was a significant relationship between convicted fathers and convicted sons (OR 3.02), and

[3] Odd Ratio is a measure of association between exposure and outcome – it measures the strength of association between A and B. OR of more than 1 indicates increased occurrence of a given event.

between convicted mothers and convicted sons, OR 2.98 (as well as between convicted mothers and convicted daughters).

Jahanshahi et al. (2021), drawing on a large-scale Scottish dataset, explored the role of maternal offending specifically. Like earlier studies, they found a significant risk increase for children (boys and girls as a single group) of mothers who offended (OR 4.1); even controlling for variables such as poverty and neighbourhood deprivation. Boys were at higher risk of offending than girls, regardless of whether these boys had an offending mother or not. Having a mother who offended after the child's birth was correlated with 58% risk of offending for boys and 35% risk for girls. However, controlling for factors such as poverty and a range of other risk factors including childhood adversity, there was no evidence of maternal offending on its own influencing offending by boys. This suggests a far less direct impact of maternal offending on boys than on girls. There was a stronger mother-daughter association, and a lack of association between girls' offending and wider factors such as growing up in poverty, suggesting that girls may be more able to resist these wider environmental criminogenic factors. The potential pathways for offending by girls and boys discussed in this study will be addressed below and the authors (Jahanshahi et al. 2021) did not seek to explore causal mechanisms.

Another factor is the types of offence the parent commits. Van de Weijer et al (2014), in a Dutch study, found that boys whose fathers were violent were more likely to engage in the same types of behaviours, and were more likely to show continuity of behaviour than sons whose fathers committed non-violent offences. The authors note that there are different mechanisms for intergenerational offending, such as social learning, exposure to negative influences within neighbourhoods, poor parenting techniques, and others. The authors posit that some of these might apply more to sons with violent fathers. For example, sons may be more likely to witness their fathers' violent offending (such as domestic violence or child abuse) than sons of fathers who commit non-violent offending (such as fraud or burglary). They also note that violence and aggression are likely to manifest in everyday life (which can link to poor parenting, as well as learned aggressive behaviour).

A further factor is patterns of parental imprisonment. A large longitudinal American study (Swisher and Shaw-Smith 2015), following a sample of schoolchildren examined length and frequency of parental imprisonment. The analytical sample was over 14,000 at wave

IV (those who participated at waves I through to IV), with about 14% of those reporting paternal imprisonment. The authors explored the effect of repeated paternal imprisonment (Swisher and Shaw-Smith 2015) and found that its frequency was associated with a progressively higher risk of child offending.

Swisher and Shaw Smith (2015) found that more frequent and longer periods of paternal imprisonment had a stronger association with a child's delinquency than less frequent and shorter periods of imprisonment, suggesting a dosage effect. Respondents reporting a ten-year-or-longer period between their father's first incarceration and last release have 37% higher delinquency than do youths without an incarcerated parent. Those who did not know what age they were at the time of their fathers' imprisonment had a delinquency rate of 23%. At the same time, short experiences with incarceration of up to one year in length were significantly associated with a 15% higher level of delinquency. However, there were differences by gender. Boys were more affected by short and one-off periods of paternal imprisonment, whereas girls by more frequent or longer periods of paternal imprisonment. The authors suggested that boys' identities might be disrupted if a father offends when he previously did not, whereas sons of those serving long sentences might cease to identify with their fathers, though these are speculative interpretations.

Van Dijk et al (2022) found an 8% risk increase with each paternal offence, but no increased risk with additional offending by mothers – this was true for both boys and girls. However, although there was no increased risk for each individual offence committed by mothers, this particular study found the children of mothers who offended were twice as likely to have a criminal record themselves. Note, this study was on organised crime specifically, however, and therefore may not be applicable to other types of offending.

The Dutch research (Van de Weijer et al 2014), drawing on longitudinal data, found that for violent offences, a father committing a violent offence before the child's birth did not increase the risk of their son going on to commit a violent offence (provided the father did not go on to commit violent offences after the birth of their son). Likewise, in the Scottish dataset, Jahanshahi et al. (2021) found that only maternal offending during the child's lifetimes (as opposed to before the child's birth) increased the risk of offending for girls. However, in the US longitudinal research (Swisher and Shaw-Smith 2015, who had the larger dataset and focused upon general offending rather than violent offending), it was

found that having an imprisoned father at any age resulted in higher risks of later offending, with it being highest when the father was imprisoned prior to birth and released after birth (48% coefficient).

In a Dutch study on intergenerational transmission of organised crime, it was found that sons were almost twice as likely to offend compared to daughters, but children of *women* who committed organised crime were twice as likely to have a criminal record (Van Dijk et al. 2022). It should be noted that the sample of mothers was small (n = 38), The risk was higher for sons of mothers who committed organised crime than for daughters. The authors speculate that women involved in organised crime are likely to marry men who exhibit similar offending, meaning the effect may have been that of having both a mother and a father who offended. Additionally, it was found that the proportion of children who had a criminal record was significantly higher among those parents who persisted in offending even after the child turned 18. The authors also note that children of people who commit organised crime tend to grow up in closed family systems, and may be exposed to drugs, aggressions and even contract killings, etc. This in turns may mean that interventions for these children may have to be different to those aimed at children of other types of people who offend – with the caveat that much more research is needed on this subgroup of children.

4.2 Why are children with a parent in prison more likely to go on to offend?

A multitude of sociological, criminological, psychological, and biological theories have attempted to explain the causes of intergenerational offending. Parents who have offended tend to be drawn from backgrounds characterised by numerous forms of disadvantage, including poverty, unemployment, poor mental health, and others (Social Exclusion Unit 2002). It is therefore important to attempt to untangle the extent to which the effect on their children is that of having a parent who offended directly, or is one of growing up in adverse circumstances, or a combination of the two processes.

One type of explanation focuses on parenting behaviours. Parents who offend and/or behave antisocially have been found to practice less effective parenting behaviours, which acts as a mediator to their children exhibiting antisocial behaviours as well (see Patterson

and Dishion 1988, Conger et al. 1995).[4] Studies have found that effective parenting, including consistent discipline and specifically knowing where the child is, to be a mediating factor for childhood antisocial behaviour (ASB) (e.g., Thornberry et al 2009). Notably, effective parenting (as measured by a composite index of measures) by mothers and mothers' self-reported levels of parenting stress were the only variables to reduce childhood ASB, whereas for high-contact fathers (defined as living with the child or seeing them more than once a week), other variables played a role in child offending, including father's drug use and self-reported levels of parenting stress (Thornberry et al 2009). Yet it has also been recognised that many people who offend are drawn from socio-economically disadvantaged areas and experience, meaning parents will have less social and economic capital and experience more stress, which will in turn affect their ability to parent effectively (Auty, Farrington and Coid 2017). Thus, intergenerational offending is argued to be a feature of both individual and societal factors.

As discussed earlier, Jahanshahi et al. (2021) explored the role of maternal offending. Deeper analysis revealed that the pathways for boys and girls were notably different. Compared to girls, boys' offending was likely to be influenced by external factors, such as weak social bonds and childhood abuse, rather than directly via maternal offending. Girls were more directly affected by maternal offending and, to a weaker extent, the quality of the parent-child relationship. In other words, there was a weaker independent effect shown of maternal offending on offending of sons: rather, the boys' general health and cognitive abilities were significant. It is possible that learned gender roles explained transmission between mothers and daughters, such as girls' internalising negative feelings. The implication is that interventions aimed at reducing intergenerational offending ought to aim to address both the direct effects of maternal imprisonment (e.g., via women's centres) and other factors more pertinent for boys (e.g., general cognitive abilities). However, this study did not look at the potential confounding factor of paternal offending and the overall percentage of maternal offending was low (13%). It is possible that girls are more resistant to broader criminogenic environments, though this area of research was identified as highly underdeveloped. Research has also found that much familial offending is concentrated in a small number of families (e.g., Farrington and Crago 2017).

[4] Note papers may be outdated given publication date

Auty, Farrington and Coid (2017) propose a multi-faceted mechanism to explain intergenerational offending comparing both maternal and paternal offending and the risk for boys and girls. Having a convicted parent significantly increased a wide range of psychosocial risk factors their children are exposed to, including drug use, employment problems, lack of stable intimate relationships and stable housing. The strongest risk factor identified was convicted fathers having cohabitation problems (such as not living with a partner, not getting on well with a partner). For fathers specifically, five risk factors were most strongly correlated with sons' convictions: fathers' drug use, poor accommodation, poor employment histories by age of 32, disrupted family and poor supervision of the sons. For daughters, three risk factors were significant: fathers' cohabitation problems, his alcohol misuse and harsh parental discipline. This illustrates how individual factors (e.g., poor supervision of sons) might be interwoven with societal inequality – poor supervision could be the result of factors such as having to work multiple jobs. Earlier research has found that being a young parent does not in itself increase the risk of the young parents' children going on to offend (Farrington et al. 2015).[5]

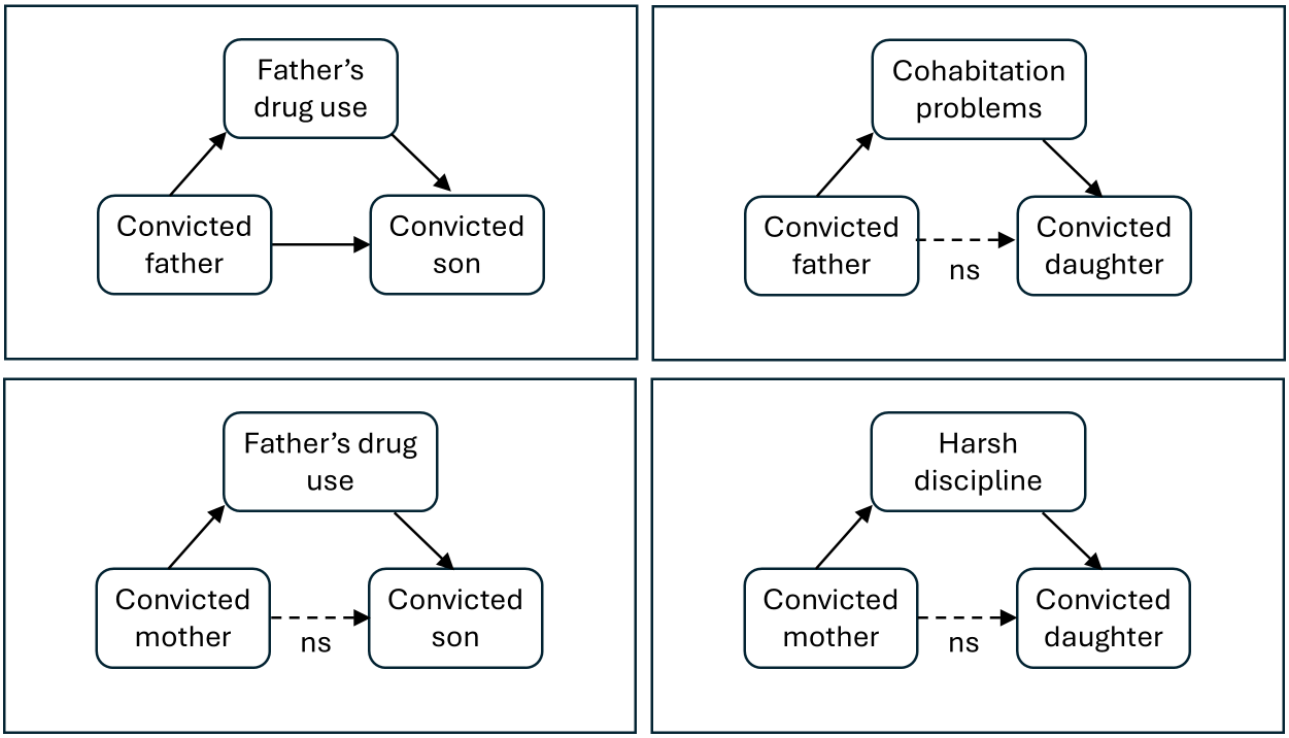
The researchers then explored the extent to which intergenerational offending was mediated through (i.e., associated with) the above risk factors as opposed to being directly linked to having a convicted parent. In other words, does imprisonment itself lead to children's offending, or is it mediated through specific psychosocial problems (i.e. indirect link between parental conviction and children's offending). Interestingly, only four risk factors remained significant as mediators. For boys, the increased risk of having a conviction was strongly mediated via fathers' drug use, but there was also a direct link between father and son offending. There was no significant link between having a convicted father and daughters' offending, but intergenerational offending for daughters was mediated by the convicted father's cohabitation problems.[6] There was no significant direct link between mothers' convictions and those of their sons, but a convicted mother and a drug-using father (the authors suggest that this is because convicted mothers are likely to have partners from similar backgrounds) yielded significant intergenerational offending. Finally, the link between convicted mothers and daughters' offending was

[5] Paper defines 'poor supervision' as parents not knowing the location of their children when they went out before the age of 16.

[6] Cohabitation problems defined as 3 or more of: Not living with a partner; not married or co-habiting for five years or more; not divorced in the last five years; not getting on well with partner).

mediated via harsh parental discipline, with no significant direct link. These are depicted in the figure:

Figure 1: Moderating factors for intergenerational offending (Auty, Farrington and Coid, 2017)



As this study uses data from the Cambridge Study of Delinquent Behaviour, is unclear whether the data remains relevant, as the data analysed in 2017 pertains to a now older cohort of participants (the children of the original cohort born in 1953, when it was both more common for women to be stay at home mothers and when social norms for girls were more traditional).

Drawing on the processes depicted in Figure 1, the authors suggest that women who offend are likely to partner and have children with men who behave antisocially as stated previously (i.e. are convicted themselves, as shown on the top left mechanism, *and* use drugs) and this has been found to be the case in a range of research studies (see Auty, Farrington and Coid 2017 for an overview). Overall, the implication of their findings is that different interventions are needed for girls than for boys as the risk factors appear to be different. The authors imply that for girls, targeting home environment risk factors may be more effective than for boys.

A systematic review (Flanagan et al, 2019) of research into parental supervision (often defined as the parent knowing the whereabouts and activities of their child, though definitions vary, as Flanagan et al. note) and offending found that poor parental supervision was more strongly associated with boys' offending than with girls' offending. Again, the reasons for this, as hypothesised by the authors (though not supported by evidence), may be that girls might spend more time in the home, with boys spending more time away from home which might theoretically lead them to encounter more opportunities to offend. The review also notes that less supervision means boys may be more likely to exhibit less self-control.

Conversely, effective supervision was associated with an 18% lower risk of the child offending. This research did not focus on intergenerational offending specifically, though it does offer an insight into the importance of supervision and its link to child antisocial behaviour. Importantly, neighbourhood deprivation seemed to play an important role – the review found evidence that supervision tended to be more effective in non-deprived neighbourhoods than in deprived ones. This may be because deprived areas are more likely to expose children to peers who offend, for example, as well as substance abuse. There were few studies looking specifically at the supervision provided by fathers, so the authors were unable to analyse by the gender of the parent.

4.3 What is the impact of parental imprisonment on children?

There is a wealth of research showing a range of negative outcomes for children affected by parental imprisonment. However, it is difficult to establish causality, i.e., is it imprisonment or pre-existing problems that cause the negative outcomes? No randomised control trials have taken place (Murray et al. 2009) to ascertain whether it is parental imprisonment, pre-existing challenges (poverty, poor mental health, etc) or both that are responsible for the poor outcomes of children with a parent in prison. There is also a distinction to be made between the immediate impact of parental imprisonment (feelings of shock, grief, loss after arrest) and long-term impacts (such as long-term mental and physical health impacts).

Research using standardised questionnaires (Jones et al. 2013) found that children with a parent in prison are at higher risk of mental health difficulties. Responses from children

with a parent in prison across four countries (including the UK), and their carers, were compared to a UK normative dataset. The surveys include several subscales: e.g., hyperactivity, emotional difficulties, difficulties with peer relationships and conduct problems. Overall, compared to the normative sample, children with a parent in prison tended to score lower on mental and emotional wellbeing. Overall, at least 25% of children aged 11 or above with a parent in prison had raised scores (according to parent/carer ratings), suggesting a higher risk of mental health difficulties. For the UK specifically, the total difficulties score was 10.5 for girls and 13.0 for boys with a parent in prison (aged 11+, as reported by non-imprisoned parent/carer), with the UK norm being 7.6 and 8.8 respectively (as reported by parent/carer). The difference was lower for children's self-reported outcomes for children aged 11+ with a parent in prison (10.1 for girls and 11.9 for boys), but still higher than the UK norm (10.0 for girls and 10.5 for boys, where children aged over eleven self-report).

A review of research on children with parents in prison found that they are twice as likely to have poor mental health compared to their peers without a parent in prison (Murray et al. 2009). This review found that although parental imprisonment was a risk factor for poorer mental health in children, it was not possible to establish whether parental imprisonment caused poor mental health outcomes, because many of the studies did not control for important confounding factors such as mental health pre-parental imprisonment. It is also difficult to establish whether mental health difficulties such as childhood depression are directly causally linked to parental imprisonment; the existing evidence is mixed (Swisher and Shaw-Smith 2015). Regardless of causality, it is clear children affected by parental imprisonment experience numerous difficulties. Considering imprisonment is known to cause new stressors (feelings of grief, trauma, household upheaval) it is reasonable to suspect that imprisonment has at least some causal effect, perhaps cumulative to pre-existing socio-economic problems. There is, furthermore, an emergent consensus that parental imprisonment is likely causally linked to externalising behaviours such as aggression amongst children (Swisher and Shaw-Smith, 2015).

A meta-analysis of 40 studies (Murray et al. 2012) found that parental incarceration was associated strongly with their children having low educational attainment (OR 1.4); yet when controlled for covariates, the effect of parental incarceration on their children's

educational attainment was weak to zero. It may be that it is factors external to imprisonment that are causally linked to children's lower education attainment. However, it was noted that many of the studies were methodologically poor and more longitudinal research is needed for firmer conclusions about causality. The studies analysed controlled for different covariates (e.g. parental offending as opposed to parental incarceration – thus allowing disentanglement of the effect of parental imprisonment from parental offending itself).

Educationally, children's school attainment may suffer because of the mental and practical effects of having a parent in prison. Their behaviour might impact their education, but visitation might also mean taking time off from school (see Crest, 2019). There are few studies specifically assessing the educational impact of parental imprisonment. Stanton (1980) in a medium-sized US study (54 mothers in prison and 22 mothers on probation and their children) compared outcomes for these two groups, hypothesizing that the background characteristics of both groups were likely to be similar and therefore child outcomes would be attributable to imprisonment as opposed to maternal offending. In terms of children's academic performance, children of imprisoned women performed worse than those of women on probation, with 50% of children of imprisoned mothers rated by teachers as having poor or below average school performance. The equivalent number for children of mothers on probation was 22%. However, teacher response rate was low (data was returned for 22 children of imprisoned mothers only). Further uncontrolled factors may explain differences in outcomes. For example, an imprisoned woman may have been more likely to have had prior imprisonment than a woman on probation and/or there may have been teacher bias. Stanton's study is now also dated, and the US findings may not be generalisable to the UK.

Another small US study of mothers in prison (58 children aged 13-19, with outcomes reported by 47 guardians and 41 mothers) found that high rates of school drop-out were observed amongst their children (Trice and Brewster, 2004). Children were four times more likely to be out of school than their control-group best friends (it is not known if the best friends themselves had an offending parent – a potentially significant limitation). Notably, children whose imprisoned mothers had high levels of education (completed high school) did better – dropout rates were 15% for children of mothers who completed high

school but 52% for those whose mothers did not complete high school. Overall, 45% of children with a mother in prison failed classes compared to 20% of their best friends. However, this data was collected while the mothers were imprisoned and was not benchmarked against children's pre-maternal imprisonment educational wellbeing.

Similarly, an Australian study (156 children with a parent currently or previously in prison or awaiting sentencing) found the children had behavioural problems (27% exhibiting disruptive behaviour in school, n=62), but some also had frequent absences, lack of appropriate school equipment and health problems affecting schooling (Sheehan 2010). One third of pre-school age children experienced health problems, and 23% of school-aged children. Notably, there is no control group, and the sample was children known to courts due to child protection concerns, which is not representative of all children with a parent in prison. A large-scale study of Danish administrative data (2215 children with a father in prison for traffic offences only) found that on average, children with a father in prison were twice as likely to not complete their compulsory education (though if they did, their grades were not markedly different), and boys were affected more than girls (Anker 2023).

Despite evidence of negative outcomes amongst children with a parent in prison, under some circumstances children might benefit from and/or feel relief if, for example, a violent or abusive parent is imprisoned (Jones et al, 2013). However, there is no evidence to suggest that most parents in prison are such. Moreover, this does not mean that the child will not experience ambivalent feelings (e.g., loss and grief, anger, depression) and issues related to stigma, amongst others.

A literature review found that the impact of maternal imprisonment can be more disruptive than paternal imprisonment for children, as this often involves the resident carer of the child going into prison (Murray and Farrington 2008). The overwhelming majority of mothers in prison will have previously lived with their child. Caddle and Crisp's (1997) comprehensive but now dated study found that 70% of mothers in prison were living with their children prior to imprisonment, and most of these children were looked after by kin rather than fathers following the mother's imprisonment. Only 5% of children remained in the same home following a mother's imprisonment. By comparison, 90% of children whose fathers were sent to prison remained in the care of their mother. Thus, imprisonment of

mothers will often involve the child having to move residences, and at times, neighbourhoods and schools. Children of mothers in prison have been reported as having poorer life outcomes (Kruttschnitt 2010). However, further research would be needed to establish where children of imprisoned mothers are living.

There is some evidence to suggest there may now be more children being cared for by their fathers, perhaps reflecting more recent wider changes in society's perceptions of the role of fathers. In Caddle and Crisp's 1997 study 9% of children were cared for by fathers, with O'Malley's 2018 study finding 27% of children being cared for by their father (and this was the most common carer arrangement, with 25% of children being cared for by their grandmother). It appears that children of women in prison are often looked after by relatives such as grandmothers, aunts, and other non-parent carers (Booth 2020).

Minson (2019) undertook qualitative research with children of imprisoned mothers (and their caregivers) and found evidence of the sadness (termed 'confounding grief') of children whose relationships with their mothers were radically changed as a result of imprisonment. Caregivers described the children's intense emotional needs as being very different to those of their peers, and their grief may be expressed as angry and aggressive behaviours. Further evidence of the emotional affects upon children of imprisoned mothers are described in qualitative research completed by Baldwin and Epstein (2017) and include insecurity, bedwetting, nightmares, sibling separation, bullying and loss of education.

There is also evidence of heightened risk over the longer-term for children who have a parent in prison (though again this is risk without evidence of any causal impact of parental imprisonment specifically). Murray and Farrington (2008), in their literature review, found that children are at much higher long-term risk of unemployment at 18 (13 Odds Ratio) and at 32 years of age (3.1 Odds Ratio).

Furthermore, parental imprisonment is recognised as an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE). Imprisonment of a household member is associated with a fivefold increase in exposure to other ACEs (Turney, 2018). Increased exposure to multiple ACEs is associated with an increased risk of negative health-related outcomes such as smoking, drug use and binge-drinking (Health Scotland, 2017).

4.4 Protective factors and interventions to reduce intergenerational offending

Previous sections illustrate how the mechanisms through which parental imprisonment is linked to the later offending of a child are complex, multi-faceted and long-term. Notably, however, many children with convicted parents do not offend. It is important to consider what the protective factors are as they may support development of interventions. As Luther (2015) noted, focusing solely on risk factors alone does not help meaningful policy development. In this section, an overview of literature on interventions aimed at reducing intergenerational offending is provided, as well as a discussion of the small number of existing evaluations. We start with a more general discussion of protective and risk factors, and go on to discuss specific UK interventions and evaluations.

In a review of 112 longitudinal studies of youth violence in general, Losel and Farrington (2012) identified several protective factors, which included individual (above-average intelligence, pro-social attitudes), familial (positive relationships with at least one parent, parental supervision) and community factors (peers who did not offend, non-disadvantaged neighbourhoods). These tie into the Auty, Farrington and Coid (2017) study on risk factors, suggesting that interventions need to be multi-level and address structural factors such as economic deprivations as well as individual and familial concerns such as parenting and education. Luther (2015), in a small qualitative US study, found that positive interpersonal relationships seemed to protect a sample of 32 children with parents in prison from later offending. Provision of childhood activities offering children an opportunity to engage with others in non-offending contexts were considered important.

Research has found that a key protective factor for children of people in prison is their relationship with the parent or guardian they live with, as well as supportive informal social network (see Jones et al., 2013, also Losel and Bender, 2003). Note that the impact of imprisonment on the child, the resident carer and other family members are not necessarily separate. There is wealth of research documenting the negative impact of imprisonment on adult relatives of people in prison (e.g., see Condry, Kotova and Minson 2016 for an overview). This includes emotional, financial, and physical problems, which may have a subsequent effect on the child (e.g., if the resident parent experiences acute stress).

In contrast, if the resident carer copes well and is supported, the child may adjust to a parent's imprisonment more easily. Wakefield (2015) found that paternal imprisonment increased negative parenting behaviours amongst the resident carers, perhaps due to stress (emotional, financial, etc.). The paper notes that (although there is a lack of large-scale robust research), qualitative research with resident carers and children has found caregiver stress often impacts the wellbeing of the children. An increase in negative parenting behaviours does not necessarily equate to a corresponding decrease in positive practices though. For example, high stress levels may mean parents lash out but then compensate via physical affection like hugging.

The nature and quality of the relationship between the child and their imprisoned parent may be a further factor. There is one systemic review of longitudinal studies of paternal involvement on children's development – albeit outside of the prison context (Sarkadi et al., 2007). This review found that paternal cohabitation resulted in less aggressive behaviour in socio-economically deprived boys, and high father engagement in the context of a stable marriage predicted lower chances of delinquent behaviour among both girls and boys who were economically disadvantaged. In a cohort of more socially advantaged children with two-parent families, boys with more engaged fathers had less behavioural problems during the early year school years. Overall, the authors concluded that paternal engagement was a protective factor for children, though they also note it is difficult to define what active and regular engagement means. Again, these studies did not assess children's engagement with imprisoned fathers, but these findings suggest general paternal involvement in children's lives can act as a protective factor for children.

Research from across numerous jurisdictions has shown that visitation (in general, not limited to visitation by children) is correlated with a decreased risk of reoffending for the imprisoned person (e.g. May, Sharma, and Stewart, 2008 found the odds of reoffending were 39% higher for prisoners who had not received visits compared to those who had). There is an evidence gap in relation to child outcomes. A systematic review of parenting programs for imprisoned parents (Armstrong et al 2018) found a small to moderate positive effect of parenting interventions in terms of improving the parent-child relationship, though the effect did not hold up at follow-up. The authors noted that more robust research is needed. Most of the studies reviewed had little information about participant recruitment,

and/or the sample was self-selected. There was no data on child outcomes. A further paper (Butler et al, 2019) considers how prison practices around visitation may affect the extent to which imprisoned parents can put into action any newly acquired parenting skills, for example due to restrictions around movements of prisoners and the extent to which they are able to spend time with their children.

Schools have been identified as key sources of support for children with a parent in prison (Children of Prisoners Europe, 2014), from both an academic and wellbeing perspective support. This review has not specifically explored the evidence base for schools as a source of support for children with a parent in prison. However, the COPING study (Jones et al. 2013) which explored the experiences of families with an imprisoned parent across four countries including the UK, found resident carers in the UK were generally open to informing the school that a parent was in prison. There were examples from the UK of junior, secondary, specialist and private schools working well with children in these scenarios.

There is also a significant potential for mental health-based interventions. The COPING study (Jones et al. 2013) found that UK children with a parent in prison needed counselling and mental health interventions, but access was mixed. A question remains whether these children are already at risk prior to parental imprisonment due to pre-existing disadvantage, or whether imprisonment of a parent has an adverse impact on children's mental health. The COPING report also indicates other ways children’s mental health can be supported: by ensuring the caregiver is able to provide stability, supporting children’s relationship with the imprisoned parent, and so forth. However, more longitudinal research is needed to disentangle the effect of imprisonment specifically on children (as opposed to, for example, general offending behaviour of parents or socio-economic deprivation).

There are several UK-based charities/organisations that do a wide range of work to support children with a parent in prison; however, there is very little evidence of robust evaluations of the work that these UK-based organisations do. Some of this work is aimed specifically at these children, and others at children facing a wider range of difficulties that include this cohort. The COPING report (Jones et al. 2013) provides a coherent overview of existing services for families/children of people in prison in this country. In England and Wales, of the community services who responded at the time of the study to a request for

information, there were 31 community services specifically for this cohort. Twenty-five provided information about their interventions. In England and Wales, of the 83 prisons who responded to a request for information, there were 79 identified as providing interventions for this cohort, which resulted in 25 prisons providing further information about 60 interventions. Most of the interventions were aimed at promoting and sustaining family relationships and took the form of meetings or group sessions for people in prison and their children.

Of the 25 community-based specialised services that responded, most provided activities aimed at helping children cope with having a parent in prison, improving visiting conditions and raising awareness of issues faced by such families. Over 30% of the interventions included a focus on mental health, about 70% on family relationships, and about 50% on parental imprisonment. Activities offered by UK-based organisations include running visitors' centres within prisons, peer support for families and children affected by imprisonment, group activities, mentoring and offering practical advice for families. Of the prison-based interventions, about half the prisons provided one intervention, 20% provided two interventions and around 30% provided more than two. Interventions were primarily aimed at stabilizing/promoting the relationship with the imprisoned parent and offered on average 23 places. Data suggests that for 64% (38) of interventions there were enough places for those who wished to take part, with 29% (17) operating long waiting lists.

Responses to Jones et al. (2013) from 25 of the 31 of the English and Welsh providers stated that there was regular evaluation of the interventions provided. 76% (n = 131) of the evaluations were by users and 78% (n = 134) by staff. This suggests a lack of robust formal external evaluation. It is unclear the extent to which these interventions used a theory of change approach and whether reducing intergenerational offending was an intended long-term aim.

There are some examples of relevant interventions with evaluations, though the interventions may not be specifically targeted at children with parents in prison and/or the evaluation may not measure child outcomes and/or may not be robust evaluation.

Hidden Sentences is a training course for a wide range of professionals focusing on impact of imprisonment on families, offender journeys, support needs of families, etc.

A report (Farrant, 2013) on the Integrated Family Support Service which helped deliver the Hidden Sentences training, noted that Hidden Sentences helped raise awareness of children's needs amongst those working with vulnerable families, but the training itself was not the focus of this report and it was not robustly evaluated (Farrant, 2013).

The School-Home Support charity offers early intervention for children experiencing educational challenges (which includes but is not specifically targeting children with a parent who offended and/or who were in trouble with the law themselves) and has claimed to save 21 GBP of tax funds per 1 GBP spent (Matrix evidence, 2011). Research found, following intervention in schools, 70% of children with poor attendance had shown improvement in attendance, 82% with behavioural issues had shown improvement in behaviour, and 73% of parents became more engaged with their child's learning (see Crest, 2019). Limitations of the economic analysis included a reliance on one Home Office funded study for the majority of the impact evaluation data used in the economic model (see Pritchard, 2001). The data from this underlying study was collected between 1992 and 1995 using mixed methods including: survey data collected from teachers, children and parents, educational outcomes data, police, probation and social services data.

Some prisons in the UK run interventions to support the parenting skills of people in prison, which are rarely routinely evaluated (Johnston, 2012). For example, the Storybook Dad project, where imprisoned fathers record storybooks for their children.). Although there has been no evaluation of the UK project, similar initiatives have been launched in other countries, inspired by the British Storybook Dad project, and evaluated. The evaluation of the Swedish scheme found that some fathers reported feeling increased connection to their children, and some mothers reported children feeling joy at receiving stories from their fathers, and there was better quality of communication between the imprisoned fathers and their children. However, some children were upset when communication did not match their expectations (Andersson and Turesson 2022). A small New-Zealand study of Storybook Dads similarly found that over half of the participants reported improved relationships with their children (Crawford-Smith et al., 2015). The British project has been mentioned in an external project evaluation report (Woodall et al. 2015) of Jigsaw Visitors Centre, an organisation that conducted a range of activities to support families in HMP Leeds. It was perceived that Storybook Dads may help improve

family relationships and reduced reoffending, though this was small-scale qualitative research, focused on subjective outcomes and without robust evaluation.

Overall, this review has not found evidence of interventions that take a comprehensive theory of change approach to overtly articulate that they aim to reduce intergenerational offending. The review has found some evidence in support of interventions that aim to improve wider protective factors for the children of imprisoned parents, though there are evidence gaps around child outcomes (for example, greater understanding of the contexts in which it is most/least beneficial for the child to maximise contact with the imprisoned parent, or how a prison visiting environment can best support/improve child outcomes). Ultimately it would be challenging to measure the long-term impacts of these types of interventions, particularly those aimed at reducing intergenerational reoffending, as a longitudinal approach to planning and evaluation would be required.

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