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The University of Dublin

‘It’ll always be a part of him but it’s not going to define him’:

**Paternal incarceration and the academic lives
of primary and pre-school children in Ireland –
pathways to resilience or maladaptation?**

A dissertation submitted to Trinity College Dublin in fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university and it is entirely my own work.

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Summary

This research explores the lives of pre- and primary school children with fathers in prison in Ireland. More specifically, it examines how paternal incarceration influences a child's *academic* life, which is defined here in terms of personal, social and academic characteristics. A growing body of research has highlighted the deleterious impacts a parent's incarceration can have on a child, but few have approached the issue from an academic perspective; thus, very little is known about the lives these children lead inside the school gates.

The purpose of the literature review is to assemble and critically examine existing research in order to piece together what is actually known about the academic lives of children with incarcerated fathers and, in so doing, to inform the development of research questions. It first explores the repercussions of a father's departure from the home, including emotional and developmental outcomes as well as the specific voids left by absent fathers. Existing research has highlighted a number of moderating factors that could serve either to reduce or increase the impact of paternal absence through incarceration, such as the level and quality of parent-child contact before and during incarceration and a child's age or gender. But it is clear from existing studies that having a father (or mother) sentenced to prison has repercussions for children that extend beyond those pertaining solely to the *absence* of a parent. For example, financial insecurity, residential instability and social exclusion have been well-documented by researchers as difficulties faced by families of incarcerated parents. Having discussed these and similar (indirect) effects of paternal imprisonment, the literature review proceeds to examine existing research relating to the educational outcomes of children with incarcerated parents, before considering specific emotional and behavioural reactions and health considerations.

The research questions that emerged from a comprehensive review of the literature were:

- What are the experiences of pre- and primary school children in Ireland who have a father in prison?

- How are these experiences interpreted by children with incarcerated fathers and key members in their lives?
- What impacts do these experiences and interpretations have on children's approaches to schoolwork, their attitudes to school and learning and their academic performance?
- What effects do these experiences and interpretations have on interactions relating to children's academic lives?

Set in an interpretivist paradigm and guided at all times by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological/Bioecological Systems Theory, the research adopted a multiple case study approach. Data were generated primarily from interviews (with fathers in prison, mothers/carers of children with fathers in prison, teachers of children with fathers in prison and other relevant professionals), but also through the analysis of documents (created by or pertaining to children with fathers in prison) and observation. The process of data analysis commenced with the transcription of interviews and proceeded to incorporate Miles and Huberman's three elements of data reduction, data display and drawing and verifying conclusions (1994).

This study confirms previous research findings in concluding that, first, paternal incarceration is typically experienced alongside a range of other forms of upheaval, second, it is rarely seen as anything other than a negative experience for families of offenders and, third, prison visits constitute one of the most challenging aspects of the experience for children, emotionally-speaking. Regarding the primary focus of the study and in contributing to advancing knowledge, this research proceeds to identify seven mechanisms through which paternal incarceration has impacts on children's academic lives, namely: maternal coping and overall parenting skills; children's emotional and behavioural reactions; the roles played by teachers (generally influenced by the quality of home-school links); the removal of fathers who conduct school-related tasks; children's social interactions with friends and other peers; school-related attitudes and expectations/ambitions for the future; and interactions at more distal levels of Bronfenbrenner's EST. In so doing, the research draws attention to multiple ways in which support might be applied and, thus, potentially influence the academic lives and future trajectories of these children.

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‘When a flower doesn’t bloom,
you fix the environment
in which it grows,
not the flower’

- Alexander Den Heijer

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List of Abbreviations

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CSDD	Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development
DCA	Domiciliary Care Allowance
DEASP	Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills
EBD	Emotional Behavioural Disorder
EST	Ecological/Bioecological Systems Theory
HoN	Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943)
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison
IPS	Irish Prison Service
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
IRA	Irish Republican Army
MICRA-T	Mary Immaculate College Reading Attainment Test
RR	Reading Recovery
RTÉ	Radio Teilifís Éireann (the Irish state broadcaster)
SIGMA-T	Standardised Irish Graded Mathematics Attainment Test
STen	Standard Ten
TR	Temporary Release

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Appendix 1 List of participants

Appendix 2 Consent forms

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background/National context

From the turn of the twenty-first century, the Irish education system became increasingly focused on the concepts of social justice and inclusion.¹ At the heart of my thesis lie the interests of a group of children whose lives have been afforded little attention in Ireland to date, children who have been excluded and who, one might say, have been denied justice – children of incarcerated parents. Due to a lack of official procedure for recording any details pertaining to these children, at the time of writing there was no definitive figure available to indicate the number affected by parental imprisonment in Ireland. However, according to Barnardos² submission to the Irish Prison Service [hereafter IPS] in 2013, approximately 5,500 children in Ireland had at least one parent in prison each day and up to 18,000 children were thought to be affected annually at that time.³ In 2009 (using data from the International Centre for Prison Studies) what was then the European Network for Children of Imprisoned Parents (subsequently Children of Prisoners Europe) estimated the number of children separated from imprisoned parents in Ireland to be approximately 4,442 (cited in Rosenberg, 2009). These estimates were based on data from 2005 when the number of people committed to Irish prisons was 8,686 (a figure that by 2016 had increased by 45% to 12,579; IPS, 2008 & 2017a). Thus, we can assume that the number of children affected by parental incarceration could have increased correspondingly and, therefore, might be closer to 6,441. Either way, the very fact that nobody seemed to know the number of children affected by the imprisonment of a parent in Ireland indicates a certain lack of overall concern for this particular group heretofore.

¹ This is evidenced by the goals set out by the Department of Education and Skills [hereafter DES] in its action plans and statements of strategy in recent years (see, for example, DES, 2016 & 2017a).

² Barnardos is an independent children's charity which works with vulnerable children and their families. Founded in 1866 by the Dublin-born Thomas John Barnardo [1845-1905] it was formerly known as Barnardo's but by 2017 had dropped the apostrophe (for general details, see www.barnardos.ie).

³ These extrapolations were made using data from the IPS along with the formula of 1.3 children per prisoner (Barnardos, 2013).

Coinciding with the development of this study, the Irish Penal Reform Trust, in collaboration with University College Cork and the Children's Rights Alliance, attempted to develop a National Advocacy Strategy for children with parents in prison. This was considered by many to be a welcome step towards supporting children in this situation as, prior to 2017, they had not been recognised as a vulnerable group in Irish society⁴ (see Donson and Parkes [2012] and Ryan-Mangan [2014a] for discussions concerning the various issues relating to parental incarceration in the context of children's rights and Irish/European policy and law).

1.2 Rationale

In 1983 Matthews referred to children of incarcerated parents as the 'forgotten victims' of crime and, as recently as 2009, Wildeman claimed that research on the effects of parental incarceration on children was 'still in its infancy' (p. 277). Despite a considerable increase in scholarly interest since the turn of the century (see, for example, Figure 1), the *academic* implications of parental incarceration had, by 2017, still received relatively little attention. Given the significant length of time children spend at school and with the people whom they meet there, academic/school-related experiences and interactions can exert a considerable influence on children over the short- and long-term. Although parental incarceration might appear to some to be a disruption that is limited to children's home lives, consistent with the vision statement of the *Irish Primary School Curriculum*, it is widely (perhaps even universally) accepted that children's 'personal development is deeply affected by their relationships in the home and with other people in society' (Department of Education and Science, 1999, p. 6).

Research has suggested that children of incarcerated parents are more likely than their peers to drop out of school as adolescents and display other negative school behaviours (eg, poor attendance; see, for example, Trice & Brewster, 2004; Dallaire et al., 2010; Habecker, 2013). However, few appear to have considered the influence that pre- or primary school experiences could have on such issues. For these reasons, and with all of this in mind, it was decided to address this knowledge deficit,

⁴ See the list of 'especially vulnerable children' in *Children First: National guidance for the protection and welfare of children* (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011, p. 56) as an example.

not with a focus on academic performance but, rather, with an understanding of and a desire to acknowledge the importance of all aspects of a child's academic life, including social, personal and academic considerations.

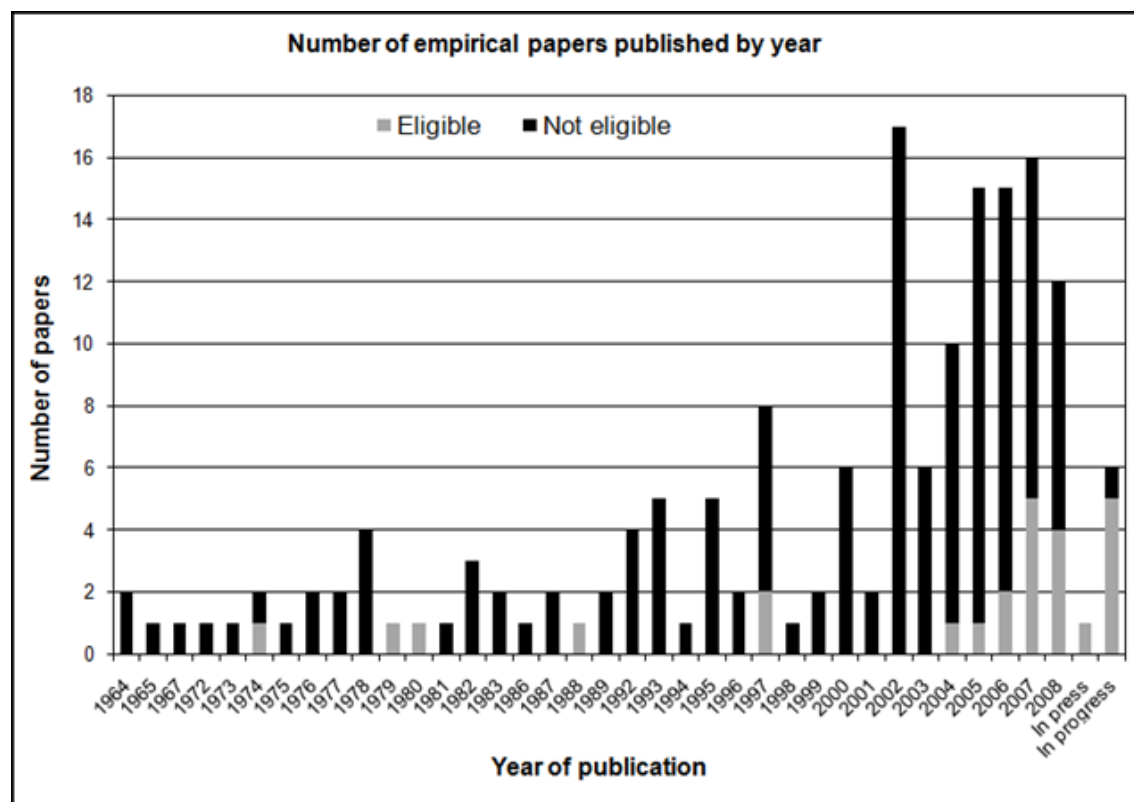


Figure 1 Recent increase in scholarly interest
(Murray, Farrington, Sekol & Olsen, 2009, p. 20)

1.3 The present study

Acknowledging the traditional variation in roles played by fathers, as distinct from mothers, I decided to concentrate on the issue of *paternal* incarceration in this study, as many more children experience the loss of fathers through imprisonment than they do mothers.⁵ The primary aims of this research were, firstly, to describe and analyse the experiences of pre- and primary school children with incarcerated fathers in the Republic of Ireland and, second, to explore and come to an understanding of how (if at all) these experiences have impacts on children's academic lives. Given the dearth of research concerning children of incarcerated

⁵ According to the IPS Annual Report 2016, almost four times more men than women were committed to prison in 2016, that is, 10,033 men and just 2,546 women (IPS, 2017a).

parents in Ireland specifically, as well as the complex nature of paternal incarceration as a phenomenon, a qualitative approach, comprising of multiple case studies, was considered most appropriate. Guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological/Bioecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), I formulated the following four research questions in an attempt to address the aims of the research.

- What are the experiences of pre- and primary school children in Ireland who have a father in prison?
- How are these experiences interpreted by children with incarcerated fathers and key members in their lives?
- What impacts do these experiences and interpretations have on children's approaches to schoolwork, their attitudes to school and learning and their academic performance?
- What effects do these experiences and interpretations have on interactions relating to children's academic lives?

More detail in relation to the research approach, as well as the specific terms used in these aims and research questions, are provided in Chapter Six. However, it is worth noting at this point that I make no attempt to suggest the findings of this research are generalisable to the broader population (of families or teachers of children with fathers in prison or other relevant professionals) in the Republic of Ireland. Rather, through describing and analysing the experiences of this *particular* research group, I attempt to facilitate "relatability" more so than generalisability (see section 6.3.2 - *Generalisability*).

1.4 Research significance

As apparently the first Irish study to examine the issue of paternal incarceration from an educational perspective, and one of only a small number to have examined the issue more generally, the present research aims at providing insight into the lives of a particular set of children with imprisoned fathers in the Republic of Ireland, highlighting specific challenges they face alongside instances of resilience, especially with regard to their academic lives. This information is particularly

valuable to parents and teachers who have daily (or almost daily) contact with these young people. As the completion of this study coincided with the launch of the National Advocacy Strategy for children with parents in prison, its findings, it might modestly be claimed, have the potential to inform future initiatives, research and policies concerning this at-risk group of youths, most notably in relation to their schooling and overall education. My findings will, I fervently hope, offer a number of suggestions as to how risks to children and their academic lives might be minimised and, thus, could have (direct) positive impacts on children's lives or their prospects.

1.5 Thesis overview

In this chapter I have briefly outlined the background of and rationale for this study. I have provided some preliminary details regarding its focus and described what I believe to be the significance of the research. In continuing to provide a context for the research, Chapter Two offers a brief and, of necessity, skeletal historical overview of the Irish penal system,⁶ before outlining how Bronfenbrenner's Ecological/Bioecological Systems Theory has provided a theoretical framework for the study.

This is followed by a comprehensive examination of existing literature, divided between Chapters Three, Four and Five. In Chapter Three, I explore the direct effects of parental separation due to imprisonment on a child's life, how these could potentially have impacts on a child's academic life and the types of moderating factors at play. In Chapter Four I look at the indirect effects of a parent's imprisonment (for example, disruption to the child's routine or loss of household income) that may have some bearing on behavioural, emotional or overall wellbeing, thus affecting a child's academic outcomes. I also examine the social implications of having a parent in prison and look at how these may affect a child.

⁶ I have not laboured overly long in describing the history of the Irish education system in the way that I have explained the history of Irish prisons because to have done so might have been redundant from the point of view of most readers, whom I assume to be involved with, or at least interested in, Irish schools and their operation and, thus, I assume most will be aware of the basic outline of "acts and facts" relevant for present purposes. For detail on that system see, for example, Coolahan (1981/2005), Department of Education and Science (2004) and Walsh (2016).

Following this, Chapter Five explores the literature pertaining to children's academic outcomes and examines children's personal reactions to parental incarceration, discussing how these can have impacts on their academic lives.

Chapter Six describes the research design. It explores my reasons for choosing a qualitative methodology, for adopting a case study approach and for using interviews, document analysis and observation as the methods of data generation. As a researcher, I encountered a number of challenges during the research process. These are described, along with how data analysis was approached. The chapter also explores how the sensitive nature of the research (and its participants) had an impact on the study, from an ethical perspective. Finally, the issues of validity, reliability, bias, positionality and reflexivity are discussed.

Chapter Seven provides an overview of the main findings of the research in relation to the first, second and third research questions (as listed above). Chapter Eight outlines the research findings pertaining to the fourth and final research question. Chapter Nine discusses these findings in light of existing research and, finally, Chapter Ten outlines the implications of the study with regard to policy and practice and offers some concluding comments.

But I conclude this chapter with a note on language and terminology. First, it is important to note that much existing research does not differentiate between paternal and maternal incarceration, as many studies have examined parental incarceration independent of the gender of the incarcerated parents. Thus, over the course of the literature review section some references are more broadly to parental incarceration.

Under Section 3 of the Children Act, 2001, the word child is defined as 'a person under the age of 18 years'. For the purposes of this thesis, the terms child and children are also used to describe any person/people between birth and 18. The children referred to throughout each have one or more parent(s) in prison (unless otherwise stated). The term father in this thesis is restricted to biological fathers and assumes that this person is, or has been, incarcerated (unless otherwise stated).

In addition, the terms carer and caregiver are used to describe a person who assumes responsibility for a child (sometimes in the absence of parents), such as a grandparent or family friend, or, in some cases, a parent him/herself.

Finally, throughout my work I have used the word incarceration to refer to periods in custody before *or* after a criminal conviction. While acknowledging that incarceration is not tantamount to imprisonment, with the latter generally used to refer solely to confinement *after* conviction, this is a technical distinction, relevant to the courts/lawyers, police forces, prison officers, penologists, criminologists and others, but not necessarily relevant – or even comprehensible, if they are especially young – to the children of men in prison. Thus, it is not a distinction that I have laboured over; it is those very children who are the central object of this study and, therefore, what might be called their cultural experience is, ultimately, what really matters here. As a result, the terms incarceration and imprisonment are essentially used interchangeably throughout the thesis.

Chapter Two

Historical context and theoretical framework

2.1 A history of the Irish penal system

In what Kilcommins, O'Donnell, O'Sullivan and Vaughan call pre-modern times (the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries) punishments meted out in response to crime in Ireland were physically brutal, including drowning, amputation, starving and scalding (2004). Public executions were becoming more common and 'attracted huge numbers of people' as ghoulish spectators (Henry, 1994, p. 16). For serious crimes, transportation also became a popular sanction as an alternative to capital punishment. Convicted criminals were transported to America until 1775 when this ceased to be possible (due to the American Revolution). Following this, more attention was paid to the running of Irish prisons (Kilcommins et al., 2004). Local prisons or gaols were generally used to contain debtors or petty offenders and the longest sentence of imprisonment was two years (Aylward, 2002). However the system was open to abuse as the gaoler often depended upon prison inmates for his income and bribery was a common feature of this system's operation (Kilcommins et al., 2004). The Prison Inspection Act of 1786, which required inspectors to report to the Inspector General of prisons, and the Gaol Regulation Act of 1793, which saw the gaoler become an official with a salary independent of inmates, were passed in order to reform and improve the system (Kilcommins et al., 2004). In 1790 transportation became popular again and, this time, convicted criminals were transported to Australia. It is estimated that approximately 26,500 convicts were dispatched to Australia from Ireland between 1787 and 1853 (Lohan, 1996). At the latter end of this period however, transportation came to be viewed as too expensive as well as a threat to Australian society, but it was still not until the 1840s, 1850s or 1860s, depending on what one counts, that the practice was abolished (see Kilcommins et al., 2004; Aylward, 2002; Hughes, 1988). In 1853, the number of Irish prisons totalled 38 and there were 98 bridewells (Aylward, 2002).⁷

⁷ Bridewells, as defined by Kilcommins et al., were 'houses of correction for the indigent' (2004, p. 15). Brewer gives the origin of the term as being derived from a place name in London where such a facility was once located (1990, p. 156).

In the early nineteenth century there was a move towards reform in the running of prisons and two Inspectors General were appointed for all Irish prisons in 1822 (Aylward, 2002). As capital punishment became less common during the nineteenth century, imprisonment became 'the primary form of punishment' in Ireland (Heylin, 2001, p. 16). In particular, the passing of the Vagrancy (Ireland) Act of 1847 resulted in a dramatic rise in the prison population, as short sentences were imposed for many petty offences (Dooley, 2003). By 1849 over 100,000 people were imprisoned in Ireland (Aylward, 2002). Ireland's first state prison, Mountjoy, was opened in 1850 to accommodate, in individual cells, criminals who had been sentenced to transportation before they were sent to Spike Island (from where they were transported; Carey, 2003).

Because of a move from the 'silent and solitary' penitentiary system to one based more on penal servitude, prisoners were forced to carry out 'often deliberately punitive and unproductive labour' (O'Mahony, 2002, p. 546). In the early 1850s Walter Crofton became chairman of the government's Convict Prison Board, charged with administering the Irish prison system (Kilcommins et al., 2004). The board introduced a 'stage system' in which convicted criminals were first confined for eight to nine months in Mountjoy, then moved on to other prisons in which they were expected to earn points (through being 'disciplined and industrious at school and work') which would allow them to progress to the next stage (Kilcommins et al., 2004, p. 18). The third stage saw the prisoners being sent to what we would now consider open prisons, where they continued their training and were permitted to wear their own clothes, leave the prison to work during the day and earn wages, these being paid to them on their discharge. On receiving an offer of employment the prisoner could be released on condition that he reported to the local constabulary on entering an area and did not re-offend or associate with 'bad company' (Kilcommins et al., 2004, p. 19; see also Dooley, 2003; Aylward, 2002). Crofton's stage system is thought to have had a reconviction rate of just 10%. It drew 'national and international acclaim' (Kilcommins et al., 2004, p. 19) and went on to influence the American parole system, but it has been suggested that other factors were at play in influencing its apparent success, most notably the fact that the recidivism rate was calculated without allowance being made for the large

number of convicts who emigrated following release (thus, if they were reconvicted, they were not reconvicted in the *Irish* system). It may also have been the case that people convicted, who were simply impoverished and desperate as a result of the effects of the Irish famine and not hardened criminals, may have had no need, or desire, to revert to crime when conditions improved (Kilcommins et al., 2004; see also Dooley, 2003).

In 1877 the government established a centralised General Prisons Board. This assumed responsibility for four convict prisons, 38 local county prisons and 95 bridewells (Kilcommins et al., 2004). The introduction of such institutions as the borstal (which specialised in dealing with young offenders, having its name from an English village where the first establishment of its kind was built) and inebriate reformatory (the nature of which is surely self-explanatory) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reflected the emerging penal-welfare approach, which looked at the causes of criminal behaviour and promoted 'individualised treatment' (Kilcommins et al., 2004, p. 8). However, the era of the borstal and the inebriate reformatory (along with the Irish version of penal-welfarism as a whole) was short-lived, with just one of the former and none of the latter in operation by 1922 (Kilcommins et al., 2004). By 1914 the annual prison population had fallen to just over 10,000 and the General Prisons Board had reduced the number of penal institutions to 14 county prisons, five bridewells, Mountjoy Prison, Maryborough Convict Prison, one inebriate reformatory and, as already noted, one borstal (Aylward, 2002). Regardless of whether or not this reduction was a product of the board's 'zeal' or enthusiasm for reform, as implied by Aylward (2002, p. 573), it nonetheless reflected a 90% reduction of the prison population in just 65 years.

Following the foundation of the modern Irish state in 1922, there were not many changes made to the prison system. In fact, Aylward claims that the arrival of independence 'did not change the core structure of our prisons one iota' (2002, p. 574). The General Prisons Board, however, was abolished in 1928 and the Department of Home Affairs (to be renamed the Department of Justice in 1923, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in 1997, the Department of Justice and Law Reform in 2010 and the Department of Justice and Equality in 2011) took

over the running of the prison system. The most noteworthy occurrence over the 50 years following 1928 was the introduction of the Rules for the Government of Prisons, 1947, which set out conditions and procedures for the accommodation and treatment of prisoners as well as rules for prison staff.

Declining numbers of prisoners from then to the 1950s resulted in the closure of prisons around the country and, by 1956, the only prisons that remained in use as such were Limerick, Mountjoy, Portlaoise and St. Patrick's (which became a specialist institution for young offenders in that year). Aylward has suggested that emigration resulted in the removal of many potential prisoners from the country and this may be so (2002). Certainly, as Ireland experienced a decline in emigration in the 1960s it also saw an increase in the prison population. However, it is important to note that, while the prison population *was* extremely low at this point, there were numbers of people incarcerated in institutions *other* than prisons. For example, in 1956, when just 373 people were incarcerated in prisons, 4,925 were confined in industrial schools, 172 in reformatory schools, 19,436 in mental hospitals, 3,032 in other mental institutions, 1,915 in homes for unmarried mothers and Magdalen homes and 29 in the country's last borstal (Kilcommins et al., 2004). In that year, the prison population made up just 1.25% of the total incarcerated population of Ireland.

From its low in 1956, the prison population began to grow quite steadily in the 1960s (though with occasional sustained falls; Kilcommins et al., 2004; Rogan, 2013). The Troubles in Northern Ireland played some part in this rise, as did the rise of drug-related crime in the 1970s (Aylward, 2002) and there were widespread calls for ever harsher penalties but academic, professional and political opinion tended to favour liberalisation and, during the 1960s and early 1970s, rehabilitation became increasingly popular in these quarters and Temporary Release (TR) was introduced 'as a flexible humanitarian and reforming mechanism' in the Criminal Justice Act of 1960 (Aylward, 2002, p. 575). That said, in 2004 Kilcommins et al. claimed rehabilitation had never 'operated at more than a rhetorical level', having been left largely to religious organisations to implement (p. 288). Overcrowding became such a problem in the system, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, that TR

came to be more commonly used to shed prisoners for whom there was simply no room. People began to speak of a “revolving door” system of imprisonment. During the 1970s and 1980s several new prisons were opened to alleviate the problem of overcrowding, including Loughan House and Shelton Abbey, Ireland’s only open prisons by 2017.

The Committee of Inquiry into the Penal System published what came to be known as the Whitaker Report in 1985, detailing the lack of investment in, and appropriate management of, the Irish penal system. The committee was ‘in no doubt as to the desirability of constituting the prisons [sic] administration as a separate executive entity’ (p. 123). Yet the penal system remained as it was, run as part of a general department of state. In 1987 Ireland adopted the European Prison Rules, based on the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Offenders. In 1994, alongside the establishment of the Penal Reform Trust, the Department of Justice published *The Management of Offenders – A Five Year Plan*, which also recommended a change in how prisons in Ireland were managed and, in November 1996, the then government vowed to establish an independent prisons agency (Aylward, 2002).

Meanwhile, the prison population was continuing to grow, with a 262% rise between 1980 and 1997 attributed by some to the increased use of imprisonment itself, a phenomenon O’Mahony (2002, p. 549) likened to the USA’s ‘incarceration binge’ (a phrase coined by Hoelter in 1998). In 1997 the expert group set up to examine the Irish situation and make recommendations regarding the new prisons agency published its report, *Towards an Independent Prisons Agency*, concluding that ‘significant change and development in the prison system... [was] necessary and that this... [could] be achieved more effectively through an independent agency’ (Government of Ireland, 1997, p. 32). Nonetheless, it was not until 1999, two years after the decision to create it was taken, that the IPS was established. The role of the first Inspector of Irish Prisons was filled by retired High Court Judge Dermot Kinlen in 2002 but the Office of Inspector of Prisons was not put on a statutory footing until the passing of the Prisons Act in 2007. This Act also granted the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (subsequently the Minister for Justice and Law Reform

and, at the time of writing, the Minister for Justice and Equality) the authority to draft new prison rules (Section 35). The Prison Rules, 2007 replaced the 1947 Prison Rules and it became compulsory for all new prison officers to complete a two year Higher Certificate in Custodial Care.

2.2 Ireland's prison system c2017

In the six years preceding 2017 (ie, from 2011) the annual daily average number of prisoners in custody in Irish prisons had started to fall, albeit slowly (see Figure 2). However, the number of *people* imprisoned each year over this period did not always decrease correspondingly. As a result of this (and the fact that we do not know the number of children each prisoner had), we cannot conclude with any certainty that fewer children were affected by parental incarceration overall during these years, although it may seem likely.

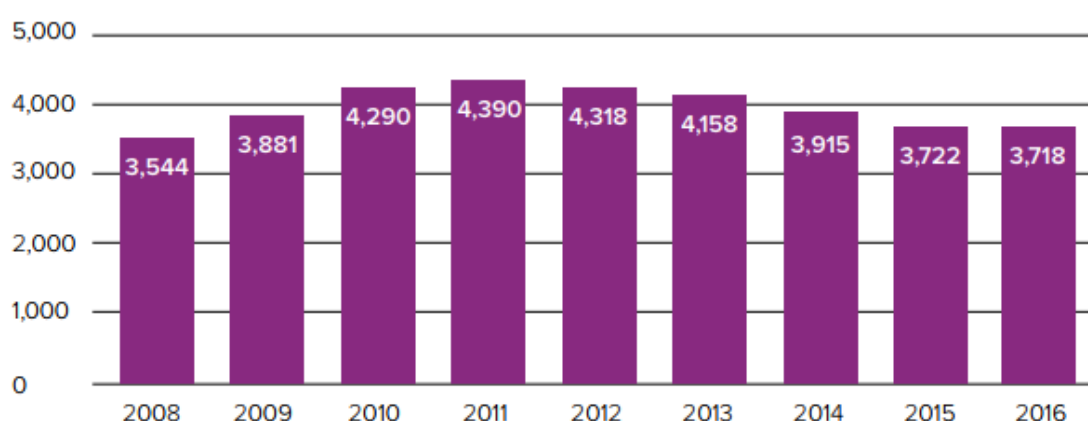


Figure 2 Daily average number of prisoners in custody in Irish prisons 2008-2016 (IPS, 2017a)

The closure of St. Patrick's Institution (for young offenders) in April 2017 – described by Frances Fitzgerald (then Tánaiste [deputy head of government] and Minister for Justice and Equality) as 'a significant and progressive step forward in the treatment of children' – meant that, by mid-2017, there were thirteen prisons in operation in Ireland (IPS, 2017b). By September 2017, with 3,588 prisoners in custody, the IPS was operating at 84% capacity (as of 27 September; IPS, 2017c). In May 2017, Frances Fitzgerald launched the IPS/Probation Service Joint Social

Enterprise Strategy 2017 -2019, entitled *A New Way Forward*. This strategy aimed to increase employment rates among people with criminal convictions through social enterprise initiatives, with a view to reducing overall recidivism rates in pursuit of a safer society (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017).

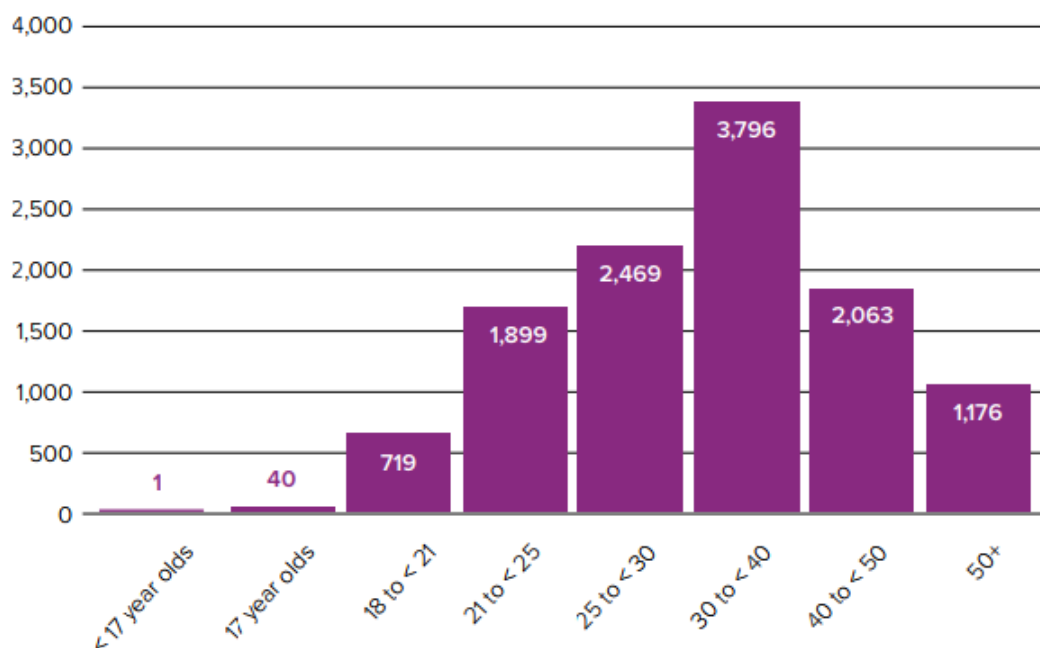


Figure 3 Committals serving prison sentences in Irish prisons during 2016 by age group (IPS, 2017a)

The IPS Annual Reports⁸ provide a comprehensive set of statistics regarding the men and women who serve prison sentences in the Republic of Ireland. Given that almost 52% of committals in 2016 were offenders between the ages of 25 and 40 (see Figure 3), one might assume that a similar percentage of young people whose parents were incarcerated might be of school-going age. However, we cannot say this with any certainty due to the fact that so little is known about these children. In attempting to understand how paternal incarceration might affect them and, specifically, their academic lives we must look primarily to international research, which I proceed to do in Chapter Three.

⁸ At the time of writing, the last available IPS Annual Report was the 2016 edition, issued on May 15 2017.

2.3 Paternal incarceration through a bioecological lens

2.3.1 Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model

A critical part of any research is its theoretical framework. Grant and Osanloo compare it to a “blueprint” for a house, in that, it requires considerable planning and critical thinking to choose and/or develop and that it subsequently dictates every decision that is made about the house or, in this instance, piece of research (2014, p. 12). It was clear from the initial review of the literature that, given the complexity of the phenomenon of paternal incarceration, the theoretical framework chosen for this study would need to acknowledge the influence of processes in multiple contexts on children's development and learning.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (later iterations of which have resulted in it becoming known as the Bioecological Model; see Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) was among the first contenders earmarked potentially to provide such a framework. Others, such as Spiel, Reimann, Wagner and Schober's Bildung-Psychology model (2008) and McGuckin and Minton's synthesis of the Bronfenbrenner and Bildung-Psychology Models (2014), were considered but discounted. Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model was favoured for a number of reasons, most notably:

- It considers development in light of the *entire* ecological system in which a person exists. Of particular relevance in this instance, it acknowledges that a child's development can be influenced by processes at the level of the exosystem. This was of vital importance to the current study, given that many children with incarcerated fathers have no face-to-face dealings with representatives of the penal systems that incarcerate their fathers and yet, such systems obviously have impacts on the lives of these children.
- Later revisions of Bronfenbrenner's Model acknowledge the importance of ecological transition and/or constancy for a child (1989) and of biological factors such as aspects of heredity and personality (2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

- The ease with which Bronfenbrenner's Model can be visualised, understood and applied to various circumstances increases the potential for other professionals working with children of incarcerated parents to relate the details/findings of this multiple case study to circumstances in their own specific contexts (see section 6.3.2 - *Generalisability*).

Although *Growing Up in Ireland* – the national longitudinal study of children in Ireland – has adopted Bronfenbrenner's Model to examine 'the "typical" or "average" characteristics of children' in the Irish context (Greene et al., 2010, p. 7), it has been noted elsewhere that the Model 'provides a useful way of accounting for variations in the outcomes achieved by marginalised young people by considering personal factors in the context of broader social and cultural influences' (Harvey & Delfabbro, 2004, p. 9). Another advantage of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological/Bioecological Systems Theory [hereafter EST] is that it accommodates a multidisciplinary perspective, which fits well with the 'multisystemic nature' of the issue of paternal incarceration (Neal, 2009, p. 14). In essence, Bronfenbrenner's EST comprises five systems: microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems and chronosystems.

2.3.2 Microsystem

A microsystem is:

a pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in, the immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 39).

The developing person and the microsystem enjoy, to some extent, a reciprocal relationship in that the microsystem provides essential experiences for the developing person while, in line with my constructivist ontology, he/she also contributes to the microsystem. For the purposes of this research, such settings might include peer groups, parents and siblings. Some literature suggests that the adjustment of children with incarcerated fathers can be influenced by such elements as the level of honesty with which caregivers explain the situation to them or the

reactions of their peers (see, for example, Bocknek et al., 2009; Miller, 2006), both of which are relevant to this system. The academic life of a child can be affected by any number of events at the level of the microsystem, from problems with peer relationships to increased support from a concerned teacher and this is why it was vital in this study that I considered all relationships and interactions at this level. Previous Irish research has drawn attention to the marked 'inequality in circumstances that exists between Irish families' (Greene, 1994, p. 357). Greene was referring not only to differences in circumstances between marginalised groups (such as Irish Travellers) and non-marginalised groups, but also to family-to-family differences in, for example, child-rearing practices (1994).

2.3.3 Mesosystem

Mesosystems involve interactions between two or more microsystems or, as Morgan, Thornton and McCrory put it, 'the links between the different actors in the microsystem' (2016, p. 11). For example, in examining the mesosystems affecting a child's development, one could explore the inter-relationship between peer groups and home or home and school. An important relationship for these purposes is that between the school and the family/remaining caregiver. If, for example, a parent/caregiver repeatedly fails to attend parent-teacher meetings or school events, a negative relationship might result between the school and home, especially if the teacher is not aware of the father's imprisonment and the additional stresses that the family might be experiencing as a result. Unfortunately, the result of this could be that the child, along with his/her parent(s), is seen as disorganised or uninterested and such negative perceptions could adversely affect the child in the long-term.

2.3.4 Exosystem

Exosystems, like mesosystems, concern the interactions between two or more settings. However, while the 'developing person' actively participates in the settings or events that occur in a mesosystem, this is not so in the case of an exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 40). Exosystems involve the interactions between different settings, at least one of which does not include the person. Nonetheless, in this setting 'events occur that indirectly influence processes within the immediate

setting in which the developing person lives' (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 40). Interaction between an incarcerated father and the penal system (or the justice system as a whole) is a perfect example of an exosystem for these purposes. Another might be if imprisonment of a father led to parental separation. Although the separation would not directly involve the child (especially if the father was still incarcerated) it could have repercussions for the bond between the child and either parent.

2.3.5 Macrosystem

The term macrosystem refers to the cultural beliefs, customs and attitudes that exert an influence on the developing person's life, generally through interactions within microsystems, mesosystems and exosystems. In this case, laws that are broken by fathers as well as the attitudes of a child's community to the crime(s) committed can be thought of as influencing factors in his/her macrosystem. With regard to the Irish context specifically, Greene (1994) and Greene and Moane (2000) have highlighted how, for example, the Irish Constitution (specifically Article 41.1.1's view of the Family) and Ireland's notable historical and religious background has had impacts on the development of Irish children at the level of the macrosystem.

2.3.6 Chronosystem

Finally, the chronosystem introduces the element of time to the equation. As well as the possibility that change and continuity over time can have an impact on a person's development (positively or negatively), there is also reason to suggest that the developmental stage of the child at the time that he/she experiences paternal incarceration can influence the level of disruption felt by the child (see Miller, 2006; Cummings et al., 2000). As McGuckin and Minton have pointed out, this dimension of Bronfenbrenner's Model 'accommodates the ongoing reciprocal periods of development between the individual and the environment across the lifespan (e.g., effects of divorce, changes in family structure over the lifespan, changes in socioeconomic status, changes in geographical location of residence)' (2014, p. 39). Thus, the very experience of paternal incarceration could be considered, in itself, a chronosystem experience, in that it forms a part of the historical context of a child's development.

2.4 Conclusion

The significance of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model with regard to this particular piece of research lies in its ability to recognise the complex nature of paternal incarceration. Examining the issue through a bioecological lens enables researchers and practitioners to consider the multiple influences that can (simultaneously) have impacts on children's development following the imprisonment of fathers. In this way, Bronfenbrenner's EST played a vital role in shaping the research. For instance, even while reviewing the literature the Bioecological Model required that due consideration be paid to influences at *all* levels – from the role of community attitudes to a father's crime to that of a child's close personal relationships with peers.

Bronfenbrenner's EST was also instrumental in the development of the final research questions in a number of ways. For example, one of the aims of the current study is to describe and analyse the experiences of children in Ireland whose fathers are in prison. In developing the study's research questions, Bronfenbrenner's recognition of the importance of ecological transition and/or constancy was an influential factor, contributing to how the term 'experiences' was eventually defined. Taken all in all, it seems fair to say that Bronfenbrenner's EST provided a comprehensive framework which allowed me to examine the effects of paternal incarceration on any child's academic life.

Chapter Three

Direct effects of paternal incarceration/Moderators

3.1 Introduction

The next three chapters discuss existing literature pertaining to children of incarcerated fathers (where possible, but often parents, more generally). With so few studies devoted to the *academic* effects that such circumstances may have on children I am forced, at times, to refer to more general works on their development or progress and to draw inferences from knowledge of other factors that have been convincingly shown to affect academic achievement or children's school lives. This chapter explores, in particular, the direct effects of having a father absent due to imprisonment and some moderating factors identified in the research.

3.2 The significance of the reason(s) for parent-child separation

Children who experience prolonged separation from their parents, for any reason, are often said to experience considerable emotional, behavioural and developmental problems and are typically thought to be at increased risk of developing learning difficulties (Jee et al., 2008).⁹ Of course 'separation from a parent' is an imprecise phrase and can have any number of meanings in the same way that separation can have any number of positive or negative implications for a child. Children's experiences of separation are likely to be widely varied and diverse. For example, during parents' deployment "military children" have been shown to experience decreases (although modest) in their academic achievement (Engel, Gallagher & Lyle, 2010), higher levels of stress and blood pressure (Barnes, Davies & Treiber, 2007) and one third of them are regarded as being at high risk of psychosocial difficulties, this being more than twice the American national norm (Flake, Davis, Johnson & Middleton, 2009). On the other hand, according to Park, when there is peace they 'typically function as well or even better than civilian children on most indices of health, well-being, and academic achievement' (2011, p.

⁹ Jee et al. (2008) focussed on children attending kindergarten. In their study children considered to have experienced separation from a parent had been separated for more than a month. This is also the criterion I use to define separation, one month being a significant length of time to be separated from a parent (see also reference to the work of Ainsworth on page 45).

67). This may be because, while their parents are at increased physical risk during deployment, their families are economically comfortable (or more comfortable than many) and such children are often thought to develop a 'meaningful identity associated with strength, service, and sacrifice' (Lester & Flake, 2013, p. 123). In this instance, the pain of short-term separation is mitigated by the long-term gain of having a parent (perhaps two) making a real contribution to the betterment of one's country, even the world.

When it comes to children whose parents work overseas (or far away) in non-military jobs, some research seems to suggest that there is a decline in psychological well-being, which influences development, education and behaviour (see, for example, Save the Children in Sri Lanka & Pinto-Jayawardena, 2006; Jingzhong & Lu, 2011). Having said this, Parkes, Carnell and Farmer found that partners of UK offshore workers thought that their families had generally adapted quite well to the absences (2005), while children from what Australians call fly-in/fly-out mining families (where the father spent long periods in remote outback locations) were seen to 'enjoy similar patterns of psychological well-being' to children not connected to such a lifestyle (Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2008, p. 309). In such instances, financial constraints are not generally an issue and these children tend to enjoy the long periods of time with their parents when they are home (Cronin & Swords, 2013).

Overall, we might suspect that the *reason* for a parent's absence (as well as the length of the absence) can play a part in determining the impact of the separation on a child. Where a child is reaping the (usually monetary) benefits of a parent's absence, he/she is more likely to view the separation in a positive light and recognition of the sacrifice made by the parent even may serve to strengthen the parent-child bond, drawing the family closer together. In addition, separations for reasons such as those described above are always or usually short and can have a planned or predictable quality. Having a parent sent to prison is utterly different, as the literature shows.

3.3 Direct effects of parental incarceration

Compared to former centuries, by 2017, there was certainly a more child-centred culture in Ireland and comparable countries (the UK, USA and so forth). But this notwithstanding, something of a blind spot might be said to exist where the children of offenders are concerned, as the desire for societal retribution serves to reduce the focus on the potentially deleterious effects of incarceration on children of offenders. Consequently, many people remain unaware of the negative repercussions of incarceration for children of imprisoned parents. Anecdotally, I can say that this was a common admission by people on learning of my research. Similarly, a head teacher in Morgan, Leeson and Carter Dillon's research stated: 'I feel a bit embarrassed now that it's not something I've ever considered... it's not something that's particularly crossed my mind' (2013, p. 6). I discuss below some of the effects *directly* related to the imprisonment of a parent and his/her removal from the home.

3.3.1 Separation of a child from a parent through incarceration

As previously noted, in 1983 Matthews considered children with incarcerated parents to be the 'forgotten victims' of crime. While the paucity of research into the plight of these children (particularly in 1983) would appear to substantiate the use of the term forgotten, I would like to consider the term victim. Broadly, we use victim when we speak about somebody who has been harmed in some way, physically injured or even killed, usually as a result of an accident or crime. Some people might struggle to think of prisoners' children as victims. After all, are not the victims those whom the criminals rob, hurt, kill and so forth? But children of incarcerated parents can, in some ways, be considered victims as they too are harmed by their parents' actions. McCullagh asserts that there are four ways in which crime harms a victim. The first is 'the direct physical harm of being assaulted or injured either as an offence in itself or in the course of a robbery or burglary' (1996, p. 7). Of course a victim may escape unharmed in a physical sense but the second is psychological damage. As McCullagh puts it: 'The experience of being a crime victim creates anxiety, disbelief and insecurity' (1996, p. 8). The third kind of victimhood is financial loss and the fourth is the indirect effect of fear and social isolation so that victims may be afraid to carry on as before and put restrictions on their own lives to avoid being victimised again (1996). Children of incarcerated

parents can be harmed in three (perhaps even four) of these ways, suggesting that they are indeed victims. However, according to Article 1 of the European Union [EU] Framework Decision on the Standing of Victims in Criminal Proceedings (Council of the European Union, 2001), a victim is 'a natural person who has suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering or economic loss, directly caused by acts or omissions that are in violation of the criminal law of a Member State' and, as I have written elsewhere (Ryan-Mangan, 2014a), this

implies that children of incarcerated parents are not victims, by virtue of the fact that the emotional suffering or economic loss they experience is not caused directly by acts or omissions in violation of criminal law, but rather by acts or omissions concurrent with criminal law (p. 8).

While victimhood might have become an over-extended concept by the early twenty-first century, it would seem that the precise legal meaning above omits at least one distinct group in society and neglects to acknowledge those distinctive cases in which the law actually serves to persecute further people who are already vulnerable. If we see the child of a criminal as first and foremost a child, it may not be so very difficult to understand him/her as a victim. Nonetheless, let us reserve judgement for now and proceed to the literature to understand what happens to children when they experience the imprisonment of a parent.

The main difficulty in conducting research in relation to children (or families) of incarcerated parents is that of disentangling the risks associated with parental imprisonment (Phillips, Erkanli, Keeler, Costello & Angold, 2006). That is to say, in studying the lives of these children one is studying the lives of people who are typically exposed to poverty, parental (or general) criminality, domestic violence, parental substance abuse, low parental educational attainment, parental mental illness, family structure instability, child abuse/neglect and other problems (see, for example, Phillips et al., 2006; Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Phillips, Burns, Wagner, Kramer & Robbins, 2002; Hannon, Kelleher & Friel, 2000; Singleton, Meltzer, Gatward, Coid & Deasy, 1998). In other words, children who experience parental incarceration are often exposed to more potential dangers than those whose parents are not sent to prison (see Dannerbeck, 2005; Johnson & Waldfogel, 2004; Poehlmann, 2005a; Gabel and Shindeldecker, 1993; Phillips et al., 2002, 2006) and

it can, thus, be difficult to isolate the effects of parental confinement from the effects of other risk considerations (Murray & Farrington, 2008b). Due to the immensely difficult circumstances in which these children may find themselves and the often 'chaotic' nature of their home environments even prior to parental confinement (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010, p. 414), it can be hard to know what damage the fact of having one's parent[s] sent to prison can do.

Genty asserts that the term 'children of incarcerated parents' is too simplistic and risks generalisations being made about this group (2012, p. 36). The children of mafia dons sent to fee-paying boarding schools are not the same as the children of shoplifting drug addicts living in communities where many adults may behave likewise, albeit both are the children of criminals. Even if their fathers subsequently mix in the exercise yard, both fathers and children will have moved in very different social circles hitherto. Be that as it may, in the absence of a more suitable phrase (and I feel that it would be impossible to encapsulate all the things that may or may not have impacts on the lives of children in this particular group in one phrase), we must continue to use this term.

Given that many belong to several of the categories listed above (Raeder, 2012) and that many of the risks to which children of incarcerated parents are exposed are present prior to the imprisonment, with having a parent sent to prison only 'the most recent and visible part of long-standing family maladjustment' (Sack, 1977, p. 164), it is difficult to know where to pin the blame. As one female prisoner put it: 'the damage was done before I came to prison' (Healy, Foley & Walsh, 2000, p. 23). It may be enough (following Gladwell) to say that incarceration can be a "tipping point" for children who were already experiencing lives that were hardly conducive to educational success (2000). With this in mind, let us explore the characteristics of parental imprisonment as a unique form of parental absence.

Separation through parental incarceration can be a particularly profound or difficult kind of adjustment for a child to experience. As one author puts it: 'Research resoundingly confirms that the incarceration of a parent has devastating effects on children' (Purvis, 2013, p. 9). Less rhetorically, although acknowledging that

‘different types of parent-child separation are likely to carry different meanings for children’ (see section 3.4.3 – *Fathers with negative influences*), Murray and Farrington’s study found that separation due to incarceration appeared to cause antisocial and behavioural problems more often than parent-child separation for other reasons (2005, p. 1269; see also Geller, Cooper, Garfinkel, Schwartz-Soicher & Mincy, 2012).

Indeed, Breen points out that parental incarceration may be more difficult to accept than a parent’s death, as death is a ‘natural and explainable phenomenon’, whereas incarceration is a form of loss that is both ambiguous and inexplicable (1995, p. 98).¹⁰ In addition, while death of any parent is experienced only once, the loss of a parent through imprisonment and the emotions resulting from that loss may be experienced multiple times. As Wildeman puts it:

this trauma may be compounded because the cycle of imprisonment and release tends to be repeated. This is a key way in which paternal incarceration differs from parental divorce and other sources of paternal absence (2010, p. 286).

The ‘worse outcomes’ generally associated with parental absence through incarceration (Murray & Farrington, 2005, p. 1275) could be attributed to any number of factors, many of which are discussed at greater length later in this review. But overall, it seems reasonable to say that the ‘years of trauma and disruption’ many children of prisoners experience ‘while their parents are engaged in the criminal activity leading to their incarceration’ (Bocknek, Sanderson & Britner, 2009, p. 324) along with the uncertainty that prevails throughout the arrest, trial, sentencing and eventual incarceration can hardly be beneficial (see Dallaire & Wilson’s study on the relationship between child maladjustment and exposure to parental criminal activity, arrest and sentencing, 2010). If this is compounded by the fact that during incarceration the level of parent-child contact is inadequate from the child’s point of view, a bad situation may be made worse (see Swisher & Waller, 2008). It is thus hardly surprising that children of incarcerated parents often do not

¹⁰ While bereavement in childhood is a form of parent-child separation (with its own large body of literature), it is irrefutably permanent and is not considered here, except briefly and then only for comparative purposes.

know how to cope with this form of loss due to its ambiguous nature. In 2014, Radio Teilifís Éireann¹¹ [RTÉ] ran a two-part documentary, *Prison Families*, in which one prisoner's partner stated: 'When he got locked up, I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep; 'cause actually I was grieving... [as if] he was actually dead' (McArdle, Ford & Leigh, 2014a). This being so for an adult, it may not be unreasonable to suspect that a child might have a similar reaction. Indeed, 80% of the 30 families interviewed by Noble in 1995 stated that their children appeared to experience the confinement of their fathers as a type of bereavement. One of the most confusing things about parental incarceration for a child is probably that it is, essentially, 'the loss of a parent who is alive, yet emotionally and physically absent' (Miller, 2006, p. 478).

3.3.2 Emotional and developmental outcomes for children

There has been considerable evidence to suggest that children whose parents have been incarcerated are more likely to experience a range of emotional difficulties or disturbances (eg, Lowenstein, 1986) and that imprisonment of a parent can have implications for a child's sense of security and overall development (Poehlmann, 2005b). While some studies have indicated that children may suffer from separation anxiety (Sack, 1977; Boswell & Wedge, 2002), post-traumatic stress syndrome (Kampfner, 1995) or anger (McEvoy, O'Mahony, Horner & Lyner, 1999; Boswell & Wedge, 2002), children in studies such as those of Posley (2011), King (2002) and Glover (2009) simply reported feeling sad and others claimed they felt abandoned and isolated (eg, Boswell & Wedge, 2002; Chui, 2010), or even traumatised (Vacca, 2008). Following her husband's imprisonment in 2011, Sue Beere noticed a 'huge effect' on their children, with the youngest sleeping in her bed every night and asking for daddy (Walsh, 2014). She stated, 'At the lowest point, the whole house had insomnia' (quoted in Walsh, 2014). Emotional problems, including nightmares, were commonly reported by mothers in Lowenstein's research, which found that children in approximately 40% of the families studied exhibited signs of emotional/interactional difficulties (1986).

¹¹ Equivalent to the BBC in the UK or PBS in the USA in being considered generally impartial and credible, Radio Teilifís Éireann [hereafter RTÉ] is Ireland's national radio and television broadcaster.

It is possible that effects of this kind may be even worse for children who have witnessed the criminal behaviour, arrest and sentencing of a parent. Dallaire and Wilson assert that these children are more likely to display emotional difficulties and 'less emotional regulation skills' than children of incarcerated parents who did not witness such events (2010, p. 413) and others have outlined the risks such experiences pose for children's mental health (see, for example, Phillips & Zhao, 2010; Roberts et al., 2014). In other words, the more risks to which a child is exposed, the more likely he/she is to display adverse reactions. Knitzer, Steinberg and Fleisch's 1990 study claimed that this was true of emotional and behavioural disorders (as cited in Wagner, 1995). And, in the same way as positive early life experiences are associated with improved emotional and cognitive function later in life, negative life experiences are likely to compromise emotional and cognitive function (Knudsen, Heckman, Cameron & Shonkoff, 2006). However, it must be said that Phillips and Erkanli (2008) found no significant difference in social and emotional functioning between children whose mothers had or had not been arrested and an Australian study asserted that, in existing high risk environments, paternal incarceration did not have a significant negative impact on a child's adjustment, using such measures as externalising (ie, directing negative feelings outwards and behaving badly in public), internalising (ie, bottling up negative feelings) and alcohol use at 14 (Kinner, Alati, Najman & Williams, 2007). Indeed, in line with Friedrich Nietzsche's well-known maxim – 'What does not destroy me, makes me stronger' (Nietzsche, 2016 , Maxims and Arrows) – it could be that paternal incarceration, even if a traumatic experience at the time, may ultimately lead to a period of post-traumatic growth or increased resilience for a child in the long term.

Sack's clinical observations of six families with imprisoned fathers over a three-year-period found that the children were preoccupied with the loss of their fathers and had 'a pervading sense of sadness' (1977, p. 170). The person who would normally help a child through such emotions is, by virtue of imprisonment, often the very person who has been removed from the home, leaving children without an essential source of support. Sack considered that the children he interviewed after their fathers' being in prison always seemed to have strong attachments to their

fathers, noting that it would be unlikely that 'penal confinement would have held the significance it did for these children without opportunities to form a strong attachment prior to the separation' (1977, p. 170).

Bowlby's research into attachment and loss suggested that prolonged or repeated separation from a mother gives rise to a number of psychosocial difficulties for the child, particularly in the early years of his/her life (1973).¹² Although Bowlby's research focussed specifically on *maternal* deprivation, later researchers (investigating parental incarceration) assert that children who are separated from *either* parent may develop insecure attachments (Murray and Murray, 2010). If a parent who is imprisoned and removed from the home is the primary caregiver to the children, or the parent with whom a child has established a secure, trusting relationship, effects will be worse. According to attachment theory, the lack of availability of a father during a prison sentence can negatively affect a child's sense of security (for a more comprehensive discussion, see Murray and Murray, 2010, especially pp. 292-296). In her study of children with imprisoned mothers, Poehlmann (2005b) found that most (63%) had insecure attachment feelings towards their mothers and other caregivers and some research indicates that insecure attachment can promote (or at least provide opportunities for) negative or undesirable outcomes for children (Sroufe, Carlson, Levy & Egeland, 1999; Kobak & Madsen, 2008).

Of particular relevance to this study, incarceration can have implications for children's educational progression as insecure attachment has been linked to higher levels of behavioural problems and reduced levels of social competence, linguistic functioning and overall school readiness (Belsky & Pasco-Fearon, 2002). As Edwards, citing Belsky and Pasco-Fearon (2002), puts it 'securely attached children advance through developmental stages toward successful psychosocial and school-related functioning more efficaciously than insecurely attached children' (2009, p. 260).

¹² Although it is not the intention of this thesis to review the literature concerning attachment theory, it must be noted that attachment theory has evolved somewhat since the early work of Bowlby and Ainsworth, with more modern understandings having afforded more recognition to contextual factors.

Children of incarcerated fathers may quite frequently miss their fathers (Sack 1977; Kampfner, 1995; Boswell and Wedge 2002; Poehlmann 2005b), often to a degree that is surprising to mothers who may not have considered their children to be close to their fathers prior to the latter's imprisonment (Sack, Seidler & Thomas, 1976). A child sometimes can act more affectionately towards an imprisoned father during visits than might otherwise have been the case (see King, 2002) and it is possible for feelings of loss to manifest themselves in many ways. I discuss this in greater detail later in the review.

Trauma may be caused by the loss itself, a change in a child's role in the family, disruption to the child's entire 'assumptive world'¹³ (see Parkes, 1988) or any number of reasons resulting from the incarceration. As one author has put it:

When a parent goes to prison, a child is left coping with a new situation and conflicting emotions: children often still love their father but know he has done wrong; they are aware that others (often including their mother) are critical of him; they may feel guilty when they become bored during a prison visit; they may find that their other parent relies on them for emotional support; they may need to support a younger sibling (Glover, 2009, p. 6).

All of this can simply be too much for a child to deal with and may threaten natural development. Supporting this claim, Wright and Seymour assert that when

challenges are too great and exceed children's capacity to cope, emotional survival begins to take precedence over mastery of developmental tasks, and they begin to show developmental delays... or regression (2002, p. 11).

Poehlmann, in her study of children with incarcerated mothers, has also claimed that developmental regression is a common reaction to initial separation (2005b).

3.3.3 Potential loss of a positive father figure/male role model

Some findings (eg, those of Phillips and Erkanli in 2008 and Kinner et al. in 2007 – see page 27) may appear to confirm the opinion that being a criminal parent is synonymous with being a bad parent and suggest that parental absence might, therefore, be of little significance to children and rarely if ever harmful. Indeed, on

¹³ The concept of the 'assumptive world' (Parkes, 1988) is discussed in more detail in section 5.4 - *Fear, anxiety and guilt*.

the one hand, research such as that by Dannerbeck (2005), Murray and Farrington (2005) and Kjellstrand and Eddy (2011b) has suggested past parental incarceration to be associated with children being on the receiving end of poor parenting, including inappropriate or inconsistent discipline and supervision, which could have repercussions for children's behaviour or emotional self-regulation (Kjellstrand & Eddy, 2011a; Cecil, McHale, Strozier & Pietsch, 2008, respectively).

On the other hand, however, Boswell and Wedge reviewed Lloyd's 1995 report on the subject and concluded that 'nothing in the research examined suggested that there was any good reason to equate offending behaviour with bad parenting' (2002, p. 63). If so, this might, in some cases, increase the significance of having incarcerated parents and imprisonment may result in the removal from the home of a vital resource for the socialisation of a child. For example, one father in King's study thought that the absence of a male role model in his son's life was having a negative impact:

He has no father figure for a start. He has no-one to look up to. He's no-one to bring him out and play football with him, he can't go to the park. She [caregiver] hasn't got the time to bring him to the park, she hasn't got the energy (2002, p. 33).

Of course, not every incarcerated father was previously involved in his child's daily life but we must not forget that this is also the case with many fathers who have never been incarcerated. As Hairston states, there are 'some men of all classes and races who abandon their children and relinquish all responsibility for their care and upbringing' (1998, p. 623). In the same way, there are men from all walks of life (if crime is deemed a walk of life for these purposes) who strive to be the best fathers they can possibly be for their children. A father might devote time to his children, love them unconditionally, support them, encourage them and discipline them when necessary (all traits one might associate with good parenting) but he might also be involved in illegal acts that result in his incarceration. One example of this kind of father could be Jonathan whose fiancée, Donna, appeared on the RTÉ series *Prison Families*. Donna stated that she 'could not have asked for a better father [for her child]... he'll walk around... pushing the pram, change... [their son's] nappies, [he] makes the bottles... he's a really, really hands-on dad' (McArdle et al., 2014a). Some

might say that a father's failure to lead by example renders all the positive behaviours described above null and void and that prisoners are 'by definition defective parents' (Lloyd, 1995, p. 28). Similarly, some might say that 'parents who lack self-control themselves cannot communicate it to their children' (McCullagh, 1996, p. 46 citing Gottfredson & Hirschi). Sometimes children may witness, or be aware of, a father's criminality and thus feel confused. However, from the point of view of children who have never witnessed any offending behaviour a criminal father could still be essentially a *good* father. For example, the man with whom five-year-old Sam enjoyed fishing trips or days in the park (Reckman, Gates, Schnug & Rothstein, 2012) was, most likely in Sam's eyes, undeserving of imprisonment.

Essentially, in discussing the significance for a child of having a father sent to prison, a distinction must be made between the fathers who treat crime strictly as an occupation and those for whom criminality is an all-encompassing lifestyle. For example (albeit involving a mother as opposed to father), Reckdahl told of Carmen who, prior to her imprisonment, was:

working sporadically as a beautician, though she was mainly making "fast money" by selling drugs and picking pockets while her children were in school... But after school, she was an engaged and caring mother – until she was sent to prison (2015, p. 13).

In such a case, where a child has previously been unaware of a parent's criminality and not obviously living in a criminal milieu, the arrest/imprisonment of a father can come as a huge shock. The event is likely to be not only unexpected, but unimaginable. As another example, although very young at the time, Francine Lucas believed her father worked nights in the 'candy business' (Bernstein, 2007). When he came through the door of their affluent home each morning, he would 'lift his daughter high in the air... Then he'd shower, change and cook breakfast while Francine played near him in the kitchen' (Bernstein, 2007). Although she was very young, nothing could have prepared her for his terrifying arrest on one such morning. Frank Lucas (subsequently the subject of the film *American Gangster*) was, in fact, a high level drug lord responsible for the smuggling of millions of dollars' worth of heroin into the USA.

On the other hand, children of fathers who are incapable of functioning due to drug addiction and/or invite fellow addicts into the family home or children who, like mafia daughter Linda Shiro, grow up hearing their fathers discussing murder plots and other criminal activities (and possibly witnessing or seeing the results of such activities) are less likely to be shocked when their fathers are arrested and/or imprisoned (Hamilton, 2012). They might also be more inclined to see the potential benefits of incarceration (for the offender, his family and society more generally) and this may have some sort of impact on their emotional responses to the imprisonment. Perhaps no father is entirely good or entirely bad and the “greyness” (all the more marked in the case of a criminal, as opposed to an ordinary man) may be what makes the situation stressful for children. As Braman, speaking of the experience of one offender’s daughter, stated: ‘that he was occasionally a good father made the times that he wasn’t all the harder’ (2004, pp. 59-60).

Incarceration can destroy, or at least damage, children’s paternal images (see, for example, Pope, 1987).¹⁴ In other words, children must come to terms with the ‘bruising reality’ that their fathers are now viewed by society as criminal and dangerous (Sack, 1977, p. 172). Or, as Sack puts it: a child’s ‘internalization of... [a] father’s positive qualities is... threatened by this new definition of who father is’ (1977, p. 173). The struggle between a child’s existing paternal image and society’s image of a prisoner is reflected in a statement made by one child who had visited his father in prison: ‘My father’s not that dangerous, that he needs to be guarded by men with guns’ (Sack, 1977, p. 172).

3.3.4 Potential loss of educational facilitator

The barriers that a child of an incarcerated parent faces in relation to academic achievement are various and varied in nature and that child may require considerable assistance if he/she is to overcome them (Glover, 2009). Teachers and other school staff are obvious sources of support in this. However, Vacca asserts that ‘the role that incarcerated parents play in affecting poor school outcomes

¹⁴ Although not entirely relevant to this study, some research has examined also the effect of incarceration on fathers’ perceptions of *themselves* as fathers. See, for example, Dyer, 2005; Looney, 2001; McGrath, 2007.

should not be overlooked' (2008, p. 51). Foster and Hagan have made a more emphatic claim, referring to the 'direct effect' of incarceration of a father on a child's education (2007, p. 421). Indeed, we cannot deny that parents are in a position to promote the holistic development and education of a child through the provision of

stimulation... guidance, limits, and interactive support for problem solving... In addition, they support the child's competence in the broader world – for example, by making possible and supporting social contacts outside the home (Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson & Collins, 2005, p. 51).

In 2008 Jee et al. found that a child separated from a parent typically was more likely to have learning difficulties and pre-literacy problems than one who did not experience such a separation and suggested that this might (amongst other things) be due to the fact that early learning depends heavily on 'a consistent relationship with an adult to nurture the exploration of new skills and expose the child to early reading' (p. 166).

While some might argue, in light of statistics relating to school completion and literacy competencies of prisoners,¹⁵ that the level of academic support that can be offered by the typical prisoner is minimal, we must not disregard the power of *emotional* support and encouragement. Of course, despite being limited in time and restricted by circumstances, it is possible for parents serving prison sentences to offer a certain amount of encouragement (see, for example, Hairston, 2002; Dennison & Smallbone, 2015) but confinement positively impedes parents' abilities to provide assistance with regard to the practicalities of school life. For example, one child described the change brought on by having a father sent to prison as follows: 'My dad used to take me home after school, but now he can't. He used to ask me about my performance at school' (Chui, 2010, p. 201). The interest that parents display in their children's educational lives can have a positive impact on

¹⁵ A study of a representative sample of almost 800 prisoners in Ireland discovered that 31% either had no schooling or had attended only primary school, 53% had attended secondary school to some extent but only 16% had completed secondary school (Hannon et al., 2000). It is perhaps not surprising that poor literacy skills seem to be disproportionately common among prisoners. Morgan and Kett found that 52.8% of the Irish prison population were rated at level one or below in the (five-level) International Adult Literacy Survey, in comparison to 22.6% of the general population, noting that a substantial number of prisoners had *no* literacy skills (2003).

those children's perceptions of school but, in order to do so, this interest needs to be more than mere lip service. Stanton's research on imprisoned mothers suggested that 'despite profuse expressions of wanting their children to do well in school, the interviews reveal[ed] that they did little to further this goal' (1980, p. 46).

Stanton observed that "doing well" in school, for many of these mothers, essentially meant finishing school, as opposed to experiencing academic success in any sense that might be recognised in a better-educated household. However, many parents, even if they are (or are partners of) criminals, provide the support and assistance (academic or otherwise) required to promote the desired outcome of conventional academic success. Boswell and Wedge offer this example, in which a mother contrasted the situation before and after a father's being sent to prison: '[inmate] was really helpful to [12-year-old] with his homework. I don't have time. I think he has suffered' (2002, p. 67); while a father in another study put it thus: 'Before I came to prison, I was very much involved with my son's education. I took him to school each day, and I was able to create a relationship with my son's previous teacher' (quoted in Ormiston Children & Families Trust, 2007, p. 29).

Such supportive parenting despite incarceration may not be universal and the aim here is not to create an illusion of father-child relationships that never existed. Self-evidently, some imprisoned fathers will have played little or no part in their children's educational lives, these tasks being left to others.

Nonetheless, when a father (especially a "good" one, but even one who has fallen short of that standard, however defined) is imprisoned, the remaining caregiver may well have to assume new or extra responsibilities in the household and may not have time/energy to continue this role efficiently. For example, the mother of one boy who sobbed, 'I want my mummy to read to me and I want my daddy to come home' to his educational therapist admitted that she had had few opportunities to read to her child since his father's incarceration and that the boy had felt the loss of that time together (Pope, 1987).

It follows that the absence of an incarcerated parent may involve not only the loss of... educational opportunities..., which as we emphasize may therefore limit the educational achievements of children, but also the reduction in the input that parents may have made to family life more generally (Foster & Hagan, 2007, p. 402).

On the other hand, if a parent (prior to incarceration) had modelled good practice academically-speaking, removal from the home could provide an opportunity for a child to take more responsibility for his/her own learning and the incarceration might actually have some positive, even motivational, effects. Such was the case for 15-year-old Meg whose mother was imprisoned:

When mum comes home...[she has] promised to help me revise for my exams. She's always helped me with my homework. There was a time when I used to just copy down what mum had written, but now I've realised I can do it by myself and still get good grades. I'm trying extra hard at school now because I want mum to be proud of me when she comes home (quoted in Kemp, 1995).

Having said this, it may be reasonable to suggest that the likelihood of a child developing an independent work ethic is linked to age and developmental stage.

3.3.5 Potential loss of disciplinarian

As might be expected, a parent's absence can have different effects on a child, depending on the role that the now absent parent had previously played in his/her life but, for many children, absence of the father involves the loss of the main disciplinarian. Fritsch and Burkhead state that 'absence of the father who normally assumes the role of disciplinarian leads to acting-out behaviour' (1981, p. 86). In Dennison and Smallbone's research 80% of fathers in prison claimed to have been involved in the disciplining of a child (and sometimes more than one if they had several) prior to their imprisonment (2015). A prison chaplain in Shaw's 1987 study explained that children who have been accustomed to the father playing the role of disciplinarian prior to his imprisonment may actually refuse to be disciplined by their mothers. Carers in Boswell and Wedge's 2002 study even attributed some of the children's behavioural/emotional problems to 'separation from the father and, to an extent, from the disciplinary function he performed' (p. 59). As one partner whom they interviewed put it: 'I've had difficulty controlling them. They tend to

fight a lot and won't do what they're told. I feel that they need a firm father's hand' (p. 66). Over the years, prisoners and caregivers alike have expressed concerns regarding children who think they can do as they please when their fathers are in prison and referred to children taking advantage of their absence, playing up and being more difficult to control (see King, 2002; Shaw, 1987; Bakker, Morris & Janus, 1978; Boswell & Wedge, 2002). One woman stated: 'because... [Name of husband] was the person who disciplined the children, and I wasn't used to it, I lost control over their behaviour' (Walsh, 2014).

In addition, some offenders may feel, even if they previously were disciplinarians, that they cannot continue this role from prison (Arditti, Smock & Parkman, 2005) and some might not want to, perhaps because their time with their children during visits is so precious, because they feel guilty for having been imprisoned or because to reprimand them in the public setting of the prison visiting centre would embarrass or upset them (see, for example, King, 2002) and this increases the need for the remaining carer to become the disciplinarian. Certainly, some mothers/carers do assume this role on the father's departure. The child of one prisoner, Jane (aged five), told Boswell and Wedge: 'My mum does the shouting now. My dad used to do it' (2002, p. 73). But this might cause more problems than it solves. Examining the home situations of children with either incarcerated mothers or fathers, Kjellstrand and Eddy found that where one parent was in prison the parent "on the outside" used 'inappropriate discipline and inconsistent practices more frequently than parents from families without incarcerated parents' (2011b, p. 29). This may be attributed to the levels of stress experienced by the parent who remains in the home (discussed further in section 4.7 - *Stress on the remaining caregiver*). If the replacement disciplinarian (assuming there is one) does not succeed in discouraging the child from acting-out, the child's problematic behaviour can reduce the likelihood of his/her academic success. As one participant in Arditti, Lambert-Shute and Joest's study quite simply put it: 'It's affecting her school' (2003, p. 201). (I discuss this further in section 5.3 - *Changes in behaviour*.)

3.4 Potential moderating factors

Moderating factors of particular relevance here are those which may affect how, or the extent to which, parental incarceration has an impact on a child's life (Murray, 2005; Baron & Kenny, 1986). Generalisations are possible. However, there are always extra elements in any study or story that confound simplistic expectations and ensure there are no deterministic relationships at work. As Murray and Farrington put it: 'identifying moderators can help explain why some children have adverse outcomes after parental imprisonment while others lead normal lives' (2008b, p. 179).

3.4.1 Level of parent-child contact prior to incarceration

It may be argued that children who have little or no contact with a father prior to his incarceration are less likely to be affected by his absence (or the reason for this absence). Shaw went so far as to describe paternal incarceration as 'an irrelevance so far as... [these children] are concerned' (1987, p. 65; see also Fritsch & Burkhead, 1981). Indeed, one child in Chui's 2010 study was quite dismissive, saying: 'Actually, I'm used to being separated from my dad' (p. 201), while Dallaire et al. reported another who commented: 'I don't think there's that much of an effect on the family because he hasn't been very present anyways' (2010, p. 284). In 2012, Geller et al.'s findings suggested that effects of incarceration were strongest for those who lived with their fathers in the run up to the incarceration. According to caregivers in King's Irish research, 84.2% of children with incarcerated parents in 2001 found themselves in this category (2002).¹⁶ These children may also have been more likely to have witnessed their parents' criminal behaviour, arrest and sentencing (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010), which could influence their reactions to the eventual imprisonment.

¹⁶ In Glaze and Maruschak's research in the United States in 2008, only 42% of fathers and 61% of mothers were living with their children prior to their incarceration and these parents, even when they did live with their children, were less likely to have been doing so in the month immediately prior to the arrest which led to the sentence then being served. Neal's finding that, prior to the imprisonment of parents, 56% of children lived with these (criminal) parents was somewhat similar (2009).

However, this is not to say that a child who does not reside with his/her father prior to his incarceration can always escape the effects of having a father in prison. For many children, the father is ‘a [significant] parent, and his imprisonment is a significant event’ (Shaw, 1987, pp. 65-66). Many children who do not live with their fathers are still actually in regular contact¹⁷ and thus, Shaw suggested that ‘the punishment meted out to a father may impinge on some of these children too’ (1992a, p. 43; see also Western & Wildeman, 2009).

3.4.2 Quality of parent-child relationship prior to incarceration

Distinct to the matter of level or extent of prior contact is that of *quality* of relationship. Roughly, “getting rid” of an abusive father might be an advantage and a “present-but-absent” or poor father may not be missed greatly. In other words, if a father-child relationship, prior to imprisonment, was poor or non-existent, the separation due to imprisonment may have little or no impact (Chui, 2010; Geller et al., 2012). However, in Hairston’s review of five studies in the 1980s and 1990s, the paternal image created was one of an ‘involved and connected’ father which contrasted sharply with the ‘negative stereotypes depicting deadbeat dads who produce children for whom they care little and provide nothing’ (1998, p. 621). Murray, Farrington and Sekol claim that ‘attachment disruption will only occur if the child has already formed secure attachment relations with the parent before they [sic] were incarcerated, which may not be the case if parents were minimally involved in children’s lives’ (2012, p. 179). That the enormity of the loss depends on the *quality* of the relationship prior to incarceration seems an important observation, with Boswell and Wedge claiming that:

fathers with whom there was already a close and sensitive relationship were able to help their children reintegrate their fragmented images and perceptions; those without this level of relationship fared less well (2002, p. 61; see also Chui, 2010).

¹⁷ In Irish research in 2001, 26.9% of prisoners reported that they had not lived with their children prior to incarceration but had been in regular contact (King, 2002). King interviewed 26 prisoners and 19 caregivers. This is why the caregiver-reported statistics earlier in the paragraph differ to the prisoner-reported statistics here.

3.4.3 Fathers with negative influences

Shaw asserts that not all children whose parents are incarcerated suffer as a result, claiming that: 'occasionally a man's influence on his family can be so damaging and negative that his imprisonment is quite likely to be beneficial to the children' (1992a, p. 47). This may actually introduce more stability to family life (Eddy & Reid, 2003) and thus reduce maternal stress (see Chui, 2010). Indeed, it has been claimed that if a father was abusive, violent, 'or otherwise antisocial' (which presumably means antisocial in some way *other* than being criminal) prior to incarceration or if his illegal acts threatened the family's safety or harmony, 'children may be better off with less parental involvement rather than more' (Geller, Garfinkel & Western, 2011, p. 45; see also Jaffee, Moffitt, Caspi & Taylor, 2003; Wildeman, 2010). This has been evident from research as far back as 1967 when Morris found that 'most of the children who did not want... [their fathers] back, or seemed disinterested, were cases where the father was in prison for incest or sexual assault on the child' (p. 427). Eddy and Reid also point out:

If a substance-abusing parent who regularly invites other abusers into the home and who also spends a great deal of time on the streets is incarcerated for drug dealing, then the children may be moved to a safer environment, [and] positive parenting may increase (2003, p. 241).

Thus, the separation may be a welcome one that enables the child to live a more peaceful life.

3.4.4 Level and quality of parent-child contact during incarceration

Professor Charlie Lewis from Lancaster University has claimed that meta-analyses that look at whether or not it is better for parents who do not reside with a child to have contact with that child (albeit referring, most likely, to cases of parental separation/divorce) suggest that 'the more contact there is with the non-resident parent, the better the outcome for the child' (Boseley & Moorhead, 2014). The importance of a child maintaining a relationship with his/her parent has been highlighted by provisions made in such instruments as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 9, Paragraph 3) and the European Charter of Fundamental Rights (Article 24, Paragraph 3).

In the case of parental incarceration however, despite these provisions being in place, it would appear that visits continue to be seen as more ‘the right (or privilege) of the inmate... [and not] the right of the child’ (Shaw, 1992b, p. 196). Some children can often go long periods without seeing a parent.¹⁸ What Murray et al. describe as ‘lack of dependable and intimate contact with their incarcerated parent’ can prove difficult for children during parental incarceration, especially if a positive parent-child relationship existed prior to incarceration (2012, p. 178). However, visits can sometimes help to maintain or preserve the parent-child relationship (see, for example, Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010; La Vigne, Naser, Brooks & Castro, 2005; Hedge, 2016) and may also have other positive outcomes (Poehlmann, Dallaire, Loper & Shear, 2010).¹⁹ For example, some research has suggested that visits are instrumental in reassuring children of their imprisoned parents’ welfare (Stanton, 1980), with one mother stating: ‘They [her children] need to visit. Otherwise they get all kinds of weird pictures in their minds about their father’ (Sack et al., 1976, p. 622; see also Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Sack, 1977). Perhaps of relevance here was Hedge’s finding that more frequent visits were associated with fewer internalising problems among children (2016). And in 2004 Trice and Brewster found that children who maintained frequent contact with their imprisoned mothers were less likely to be suspended or out of school.

There again, it is quite possible that such visits may cause further difficulties for children. For example, some research has found prison visits to have negative repercussions for children’s attachment relationships and emotional wellbeing (see Boswell & Wedge, 2002; Poehlmann, 2005b; Dallaire, Ciccone & Wilson, 2012; Arditti, 2003; Arditti & Few, 2008). Unfriendly visiting environments have been

¹⁸ In Glaze and Maruschak’s research in the United States, 58.5% of parents in state prisons who had children never received visits from their children and 22.5% received visits less than once a month (2008). In Looney’s Irish research, 32% of fathers in prison received no visits from their children, 28% were visited by their children at least once a week and 28% at least once a month (2001). These figures differed somewhat to McEvoy et al.’s research pertaining to politically-motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland, 18% of whom received visits from their children at least once a week and 70% of whom were visited at least once a month (1999).

¹⁹ Contact between incarcerated parents and their children is generally considered to have benefits for incarcerated parents in relation to parenting stress and depression (Tuerk & Loper, 2006; Poehlmann, 2005c; Loper, Carlson, Levitt & Scheffel, 2009, but see also Casey-Acevedo, Bakken & Karle, 2004). Visitation more generally has also been linked to reduced rates of prison misconduct and recidivism (Bales & Mears, 2008; Mears, Cochran, Siennick & Bales, 2012; Cochran, 2012; Duwe & Clarke, 2013).

identified as a significant factor in this regard (Looney, 2001; Johnston 1995c; Arditti, 2003; Chui, 2010; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2011; Sharratt, 2014). On a practical level, 'inconvenient' or inflexible visiting times and long distances to travel often mean that carers are left with no alternative but to take a child out of school to visit the imprisoned parent (Martyn, 2012, p. 38; see also Glover, 2009; King, 2002). This may have an impact on the child's school attendance. Even if visits *are* possible at the weekend, this can often mean that children are not able to attend sporting or other activities that could be socially beneficial to them. For example, due to a clash between training and visiting times, Shane found that he had to choose to remain on the football team *or* see his dad (Cunningham, 2001).

On the other hand, children's caregivers may fear that they could be adversely affected by visiting a prison or simply feel that it is not an appropriate place for children and thus limit contact between fathers and children (see Roy & Dyson, 2005; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2011). One Irish mother, speaking about the logistics of bringing five children to the prison using public transport, went on to say:

they're upset... more after seein' him... I give them a break, give 'em time to get settled back in again. They'd be lucky to see him once every four months as it's so hard (McArdle et al., 2014a).

An imprisoned mother named Yvonne claimed only to have allowed her children to visit once every two weeks as the children got upset and she did not want to put them through the experience more often (Stanton, 1980). Stanton (although examining the case of imprisoned *mothers*) found that the attitude of the incarcerated parent to visits and the objective for each visit was essential in determining the level of success that would be experienced during visits:

A mother who seeks to reassure her child of her well-being and her continued concern for the child will quite likely promote a beneficial effect for the child. A visit with a mother who expresses self-interest and self-pity could be unnecessarily stressful for a young child (1980, p. 65).

By implication, it might be reasonable to suspect that fathers' objectives for visits can play a part in influencing whether those visits are successful or not. Essentially, it is not simply *that* prison visits take place but also *how* such visits are approached or carried out that is important here.

However, it may not be just the caregiver on the outside who fears the possible adverse effects to their child(ren) as a result of visits. One imprisoned father, despite thinking of his children 'all the time', said: 'I don't want them to come to here and see me like this' (quoted in Social Exclusion Unit, 2002, p. 111), although we cannot be sure if such feelings stemmed from concern for the children or for his own image in their eyes. Nonetheless, regardless of the reason for it, limiting access may cause more problems than it solves.

Without access to their parent in prison, the children may face a rupture in the child-parent bond, enduring traumatic stress and inadequate quality of care which can, in turn, adversely disrupt child development (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008, p. 1120).

Obviously, the issue of visits is even more complex for children who are not aware that a parent is imprisoned. For example, childcare workers in the Visitor's Centre of an Irish prison pointed out the difficulty in keeping the secret from a child who does not know that he/she is in a prison, while other children playing nearby are fully informed of their parents' whereabouts (King, 2002). And there may also be some mothers or partners who are unwilling to bring their children on prison visits due to marital breakdown or ill will between parents, suggesting that fathers' ongoing contact with their children while they are in prison (and thereby children's contact with their fathers) is dependent largely on the fathers' relationships with the children's mothers (see, for example, Roy & Dyson, 2005; Arditti et al., 2005; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008).

3.4.5 The developmental stage or age of the child

In 1951 Bowlby spoke of the importance of a continuous relationship between child and mother or 'permanent mother-substitute' (which, in this case, we consider a father to be), suggesting that the younger a child is, the shorter the duration of separation he can endure without harmful consequences (p. 361). However, given the unusual nature of parental absence through incarceration the separation itself is only one ingredient in the recipe that influences these children's reactions to the event.

As we proceed through the literature review, we shall encounter evidence to suggest that children of all ages are exposed to the detrimental repercussions of parental imprisonment. Having said this, it is possible that each aspect (or consequence) of parental incarceration may affect children of varying developmental stages in different ways but that, overall, the outcome is most often negative.

Miller has claimed that 'developmental stages play a significant role in the child's ability to comprehend parental involvement in the criminal justice system. In fact, they are a major determining factor of how a child will respond' (2006, p. 483; see also Myers, Smarsh, Amlund-Hagen & Kennon, 1999; Lowenstein, 1986). For example, an infant may not understand the reasons for a father's absence and may fail to develop an early father-child bond due to it, a child of lower primary school age might be more able to understand (and, therefore, accept) that anybody who does a "bad thing" must be punished in some way (as difficult as this may be), while the reaction of an older child is likely to be affected, to some degree, by his/her increased awareness of the social stigma attached to incarceration, as social acceptance becomes more important in the adolescent/teenage years. Some teachers in Dallaire et al.'s research believed that the situation might be more difficult for a younger child, saying 'younger kids are more vulnerable' and that children in second-level education might have adjusted to circumstances already through previous periods of parental confinement (2010, p. 284). Poehlmann also claims that younger children may be more likely to be negatively affected than older children in the matter of attachment relationships (2005b).²⁰ Dallaire and Wilson point out that, on the one hand, older children might have developed more efficient coping mechanisms but, there again, they may have witnessed more stressful events which might put them at greater risk (2010). Indeed, Habecker's 2013 findings indicated that children whose parents were first incarcerated while they were aged seven to 14 years were less likely than those in the younger and older age categories to complete high school.

²⁰ The children who participated in or were discussed in Poehlmann's study were between the ages of two and seven, indicating that children closer the age of two were more (and those closer to the age of seven less) likely to be negatively affected (2005b).

Johnston has provided an account of possible differences in the effects of parental crime, arrest and incarceration on children according to developmental stage (1995b). Among the effects she considers most likely to observe in children in early-middle childhood are developmental regressions and trauma-reactive behaviours and she asserts that children between the ages of two and six may be most at risk because they 'cannot process or adjust to trauma without assistance' (1995b, p. 74). However, Johnston's model seems preoccupied mainly with straight forward separation from a parent and not the experience of parental incarceration as a whole (including the effects of stigma, residential instability, etc.) and school problems appear to have been overlooked entirely as a potential effect. In addition, the incarceration of a parent may occur at what Cummings, Davies and Campbell refer to as a 'sensitive period' (or a time of developmental change) in a child's life and this may increase the impact of such an event for a child (2000, p. 232).

However, by contrast to all of this, in their meta-analysis of children's antisocial behaviour, mental health, drug use and educational performance after parental incarceration, Murray et al. (2012) found no significant differences in results according to the child's age at the time of imprisonment. In addition, Murray, Janson and Farrington's research regarding later adult offending found no significant difference between the effects on children whose parents were imprisoned when they were aged up to six as opposed to those in the seven to 19 age category (2007). Both of these results suggest that a child's age or developmental stage at the time of parental incarceration is *not* a moderating factor.

3.4.6 Child's sex

With regard to gender, Geller et al. (2012, p. 68) concluded that 'the effects of paternal incarceration are stronger for sons than they are for daughters. The effects on aggression are nearly twice as large for boys than [sic] for girls, and effects on attention problems are limited to boys'. But Murray et al. found no significant gender differences in their study (2012). However, given that Murray et al. were examining effects of *parental* incarceration on boys *and* girls, it may be that the impact of parental incarceration is greater for children whose same-gender parent has been incarcerated.

Indeed, some research has suggested that fathers spend more time with sons than daughters (eg, Lundberg, Pabilonia & Ward-Batts, 2006; Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean & Hofferth, 2001) and more time with their children overall if they have sons (eg, Harris & Morgan, 1991; Mammen, 2011). This could mean that imprisonment of a father may have a greater impact on a son than a daughter (and a greater impact on daughters who have brothers as compared to daughters without brothers), not *directly* because of the child's gender but, rather, because a son (or daughter with a brother) may have spent more time with his/her father and therefore miss him more. There is also evidence to suggest that fathers of sons are more involved with their children's schoolwork, discipline and activities than fathers of daughters (Lamb, Pleck & Levine, 1985; Morgan, Lye & Condran, 1988), which could influence the level of disruption experienced by a child and have implications for his/her behaviour, social adjustment and educational attainment.

3.4.7 Length/Frequency of parents' sentences

Bowlby found the duration of a child's detachment from a mother to correlate 'highly and significantly' with the length of time the mother and child had been separated (1973, p. 31), while Ainsworth has asserted that 'early childhood separations of over a month's duration and separations occurring in conjunction with family stress or discord have been associated with antisocial disorders and later deviant behaviour' (1962 as cited in Stanton, 1980, p. 8).²¹ Despite Bowlby considering children's degrees of detachment after periods of separation to be much less *evident* with fathers (1973), we might suspect that such findings could apply, in some way, to father-child separations. In other words, that the problem is worse when the mother goes away for some reason does not permit us to conclude that there is never any problem when a father does so. In fact, Murray et al.'s study of parental incarceration has indicated that the longer a parent's sentence the more likely it is that their children will offend as adults (2007). Similarly, they noted that the number of times parents in Sweden were imprisoned was positively associated with the number of times children were likely to offend as adults (2007). But

²¹ References to the early literature concerning attachment theory (that is, the work of Bowlby, Ainsworth, etc.) are not used here to initiate a scholarly review of the attachment literature, but rather constitute an acknowledgement of this important area of understanding (and provide an introduction to this section).

Murray and Farrington point out that these results could be a reflection of the experience of having parents who were recidivists or sentenced for longer periods of time being more antisocial in general and not directly related to the length/frequency of prison sentences (2008b).

3.4.8 Type of crime committed by parent

Not much has been said in the literature about the varying impact of parental imprisonment for serious crimes and for petty crimes. Yet, Lowenstein's findings suggest that the nature of the crime committed by a parent may have implications for a child's adjustment, mainly via the level of stigma experienced by the child's family (1986) and I explore this further in section 4.9.1 – *Stigma/Shame*.

3.5 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, references have been made to additional forms of disruption to children's lives that often accompany paternal imprisonment. These include, but are not confined to, the experience of witnessing a father's criminal behaviour, arrest, trial or sentencing and the experience of visiting a prison. Attention is drawn to the myriad of risks to which children of incarcerated fathers can be exposed. Thus, the (international) literature reviewed in this chapter was instrumental in the formulation of not only the first research question – What are the experiences of pre- and primary school children in Ireland who have a father in prison? – but also the definition of the term 'experiences' therein (see section 7.1).

The chapter has explored how children whose fathers are imprisoned may be affected (emotionally and developmentally) by those fathers' absences and examined some of the factors that might moderate the impact of such absences. For example, the literature has suggested that the significance of having a father incarcerated might be less pronounced in certain instances (eg, if a father has little or no contact with his child[ren] prior to his incarceration, if the quality of a father-child relationship is poor, or if a father is abusive or otherwise a negative figure in the home). Essentially, in the same way as father-child separation can carry different meanings for different children, paternal incarceration itself can be perceived in a variety of ways. The literature highlights the importance of

understanding how paternal incarceration is *interpreted*, thus, forming the fundamental basis of the second research question – ‘How are these experiences interpreted by children with incarcerated fathers and key members in their lives?’.

Paternal absence due to incarceration can have any number of (wide-ranging) effects which, in turn, might influence children’s lives (socially, financially, etc.). In order to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon that is paternal incarceration Chapter Four examines some of these potential effects and looks particularly at those experiences that might have significance for the academic lives of children.

Chapter Four

Indirect effects of paternal incarceration/Social implications

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, due to the dearth of research specifically related to the effects of paternal incarceration on a child's academic life, we are forced to examine some of the effects of *parental* incarceration which may *indirectly* have impacts on educational outcomes for children of imprisoned parents. Murray refers to these as 'mediated prison effects' or 'mediators' (2005, p. 451; see also Baron & Kenny, 1986).

4.2 Change of home or school placement

A child whose parent is imprisoned may experience more instability in his/her home or school life than a child whose parent is not imprisoned. In 2009 Geller, Garfinkel, Cooper and Mincy found that children whose fathers had been incarcerated were likely to move home more often than their counterparts (see also Phillips et al., 2006; Bendheim-Thoman Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, 2008). An extreme example of this was 'Chandra, age 11, [who] reported moving five times in... [one] year as a result of her mother's illegal behaviors and imprisonment' (Bocknek et al., 2009, p. 328), a finding still of relevance despite the criminal parent being the mother. There may be financial reasons for such moves or, in the case of high profile cases, families may wish to escape media attention or make a "fresh start". In some cases new care arrangements or other considerations related to a parent's incarceration, such as a child being bullied or suspended/expelled for behavioural outbursts following the incarceration, mean that a child is moved to a new school or even an entirely new area (as reported by participants in the following studies: Boswell & Wedge, 2002; Condry, 2007; Moore, 1992; Bocknek et al., 2009). This may, as Cunningham suggests, result in disruption to schooling (2001). In an evaluation of the experiences of African-American prisoners' children Amira reported some leaving their bags packed because they were always moving and changing schools (1992). This instability is likely to have knock-on effects on children and 'can make success at school difficult' (Dallaire et

al., 2010, p. 288), with frequent school moves considered to be related to lower academic achievement (Temple & Reynolds, 1999; Mehana & Reynolds, 2004; Isernhagan & Bulkin, 2011). For any primary school child, getting used to a new classroom, a new teacher and a new routine each year can be daunting enough. The disruption of moving to a completely different school, especially if the move happens during the academic year or if there is more than one move, can be extremely unsettling. Researchers have estimated that children who move school are academically three months (Mehana & Reynolds, 2004) to one year²² (Temple & Reynolds, 1999) behind their peers, although Temple and Reynolds noted that many of these children were lower achievers even before moving schools (1999). Aside from finding that children who did not move school performed better on a norm-referenced test than those who did, Engec also discovered that children who moved two or more times during the year scored worse than those who moved just once (2006; see also Mehana & Reynolds, 2004). Engec noted that the rate of suspension was highest for students who moved school four or more times in a school year and decreased with the number of school moves (2006), while other researchers have indicated that school mobility is associated with early school leaving and delinquency (see, for example, Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Mann & Reynolds, 2006).

Despite the lack of academic continuity and disruption to social ties that a child might experience in such circumstances (Engec, 2006), in a few schools investigated by Demie, increased mobility was associated with *better* performance, which Demie indicated could be due to those schools making particular efforts to promote the academic wellbeing of such students, suggesting that there is no exact science in the school mobility/academic achievement debate (2002). Nonetheless, Vacca has stated that the academic and behavioural consequences of short-term home placements and the resulting changes of school 'can be severe' (2008, p. 49).

²² Temple and Reynolds's sample consisted of children who had experienced four or more moves (1999), whereas Mehana and Reynolds (2004) considered school mobility to be any move of school between kindergarten and sixth grade (the American equivalents of Senior Infants and Sixth Class).

4.3 Change in primary carer or family structure

Children of parents who are in prison (whether sentenced or on remand, ie, awaiting trial or sentence) 'have many family disruptions... [and] frequent stressful changes in their caregivers' (Vacca, 2008, p. 51). Although, according to many researchers, children's care arrangements are more likely to be disrupted by maternal imprisonment (eg, Bloom, 1993; Murray & Farrington, 2005), any change in family structure as a result of paternal incarceration may also prove detrimental to their wellbeing (Wildeman, 2010). When a parent is sent to prison it is possible, especially in larger families, that children may be split up and sent to live with different relatives (Myers et al., 1999). This can mean that children not only have to face the trauma of separation from a parent, but also from their siblings.

Even though a child with an incarcerated father may be four times more likely to enter the foster system (Bendheim-Thoman Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, 2008), most children of imprisoned fathers remain in the custody of their mothers²³ and new caregivers tend to take on the role when mothers are working or otherwise unavailable. Phillips et al. (2006) found that children with incarcerated parents were much more likely to have replacement figures or, as Foster and Hagan (2007, p. 402) have called them, 'surrogate stepparents' entering their households. This can have implications for a child's attachment relationships and a child's familiarity with a carer prior to a parent's imprisonment might be important. Often grandparents assume the role of caregiver, even though they have already completed their child-caring duties, may have health problems or may not have the funds necessary to support their grandchildren (see Hanlon, Carswell & Rose, 2007). Some women form new relationships when their partners are incarcerated. While some men may be long-term partners, others can be substitutes only for the duration of the sentence (Shaw, 1987). The latter can be sought by women for a variety of reasons: to prevent other men from pestering them, for the purposes of 'physical or psychological protection' or due to 'sexual frustration or just plain loneliness' (Shaw, 1987, p. 33).

²³ Glaze and Maruschak (2008) found that approximately 88% of fathers reported their children being in the care of the other parents (mothers), although the fact that there were 'multiple minor children living with multiple caregivers' confuses the statistic somewhat, in that some fathers gave multiple responses to the question (p. 5).

Regardless of the reason, it has been claimed that 'difficulties can arise which in turn may impinge on any existing children' (Shaw, 1987, p. 33). Wildeman has called such men 'social' fathers and notes that the 'presence of a social father... often changes childcare arrangements and might thereby compromise child wellbeing' (2010, pp. 286-287; see also Mott, Kowaleski-Jones & Menaghan, 1997). For example, in Bocknek et al.'s study (2009), a child named Destiny reported trying to keep her mother out of romantic relationships for fear a new partner would be abusive. Any new carer/figure introduced into a child's life following the incarceration of his/her father may have positive or negative influences on the child's well-being. On the one hand, some research has indicated that children of absent biological fathers can be at higher risk of sexual and/or physical child abuse or neglect, possibly inflicted by these people (Daly & Wilson, 1985; Margolin, 1992; Foster & Hagan, 2007; Phillips et al., 2006). Alternatively, Phillips et al. propose that such findings may actually be explained by parental mental health problems or substance abuse (2006). At another extreme, Daly and Wilson claim that children are at greater risk of homicide by step- than biological parents, possibly due to resentment on the part of the step-parents at having to provide for children who are not their own (2008). Alt and Wells point out that live-in boyfriends of mothers (whose interest lies in the women and not their children) are more likely to be involved in a child's death than legal stepfathers (2010).

But, on the contrary, a new caregiver may have a positive influence and thus the change of carer may have a more favourable outcome for the child or, as Stanton puts it, it is the '*quality* [emphasis added]' of the change that is vital (1980, p. 95; see also Poehlmann 2005a). For example, teachers in Stanton's study (1980) and that of Shaw (1987) reported some children being better dressed, attending school more regularly and even being more sociable during their parents' absences, which may be attributed to the introduction of thriftier or more organised caregivers who had more time to interact with these children. Likewise, Cho's research on the impact of maternal imprisonment on children's probability of grade retention (ie, the likelihood that children may have to repeat an academic year of school) also showed there was evidence that children with imprisoned mothers are less likely than children of jailed mothers to be retained directly after the mother's confinement

(2009b). The findings implied that this was a result of 'improved outcomes other than standardized test scores such as attendance, conduct, grades, and homework completion' (p. 21). Cho suggested the possibility that when mothers have been imprisoned 'alternative caregivers (mostly grandmothers) are more actively involved in children's school activities by making sure they go to school and do their homework', resulting (perhaps) in an improved living environment for the children involved (2009b, p. 21). In the case of paternal incarceration this also may happen and a change in caregiver need not necessarily result in a reduced quality of care for children.

4.4 Breakdown in parent-child relationship

Incarceration of a parent can have a huge impact on parent-child relationships. This much is obvious. However, the extent of the likely deterioration in the parent-child relationship may not be quite as clear. Over 96% of prisoners in King's study claimed that they found it difficult to maintain relationships with their children (2002). The significance of this becomes more evident in considering Hagan and Foster's finding to the effect that adolescents who perceived their relationships with their fathers to be close were more likely to achieve higher grades in school (2012). However, through lack of face-to-face contact, children may become less comfortable in the presence of their imprisoned parents and can, as one father reported, waste much of their precious time together behaving shyly, as if towards a stranger, at the beginning of each visit (King, 2002; see Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010, p. 403 for a discussion of children's mixed feelings about their relationships with incarcerated parents). And parents themselves may end up feeling tongue-tied or find some things hard to express: 'you haven't got enough time to talk to them. You can't tell them some of the things you'd like to say' (King, 2002, p. 31). This man's problem may not have been due to a simple lack of time.

Some researchers encountered children who were angry with the imprisoned parent, perhaps for leaving or for not thinking of the repercussions before committing the crime (King, 2002; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). For example, one prisoner remembers his children being devastated:

my oldest boy wouldn't speak to me for 3 months. He said he hated me... I accepted that as a consequence of what I had done, they were all feeling very let down (Ormiston Children & Families Trust, 2007, p. 22).

Alternatively, children may begin to romanticise their relationships with mothers/fathers prior to imprisonment and develop an 'unrealistic' image of their parents, which can cause problems on release when the images they have created in their minds do not match the reality (Stanton, 1980, p. 46). Parental incarceration can also result in a parent's loss of authority (see King, 2002). This can happen during imprisonment due to a parent not being in a position to enforce any rules or carry out any punishment for misbehaviour him/herself. It may become even more noticeable on a parent's release from prison. Stanton found that *mothers* who had been in prison considered children to be less obedient to their requests when they returned home and older children in the study thought their mothers to be 'less effective authority figures' (1980, p. 11). Ex-offenders in King's research spoke of the difficulty of resuming responsibility for their children following release: 'The children tended to feel that the parent was not in a position to make decisions because they [sic] had not done so while they were in prison' (2002, p. 31).

Interestingly, however, even after a lack of contact with his parent for many years, Paul (a teenage boy at a residential treatment facility who was displaying problematic behaviour) seemed to respond to his imprisoned father's intervention during a visit to the prison arranged by case workers (Reckman et al., 2012). This would suggest that the power of parental influence can sometimes survive long periods of little or no contact, although this would presumably depend on the quality of the relationship prior to parental imprisonment. In addition, Haney has suggested that the psychological consequences of imprisonment for a parent might have negative implications for a mother/father's proficiency in the role of parent on release and he/she may find it difficult to perform tasks necessary for the role²⁴ (2003).

²⁴ Such tasks include organising their children's lives, exercising 'the initiative and autonomous decisionmaking that parenting requires...promot[ing] trust and authenticity within their children...[and] being psychologically available and nurturant' (Haney, 2003, p. 55).

Finally, a parent's imprisonment may result in children being forced to assume new roles or take on additional responsibilities in the home and this could cause considerable anger or resentment (Ormiston Children & Families Trust, 2007; Stanton, 1980; King, 2002). This, in turn, can also negatively affect the parent-child relationship. Regardless of how it happens, if the parent-child relationship is damaged during a parent's confinement, it can be difficult to restore the same level of connectedness (whatever level that might have been) after a parent's release.

The research suggests that it might not be just the confined parents' relationships with children that are affected by imprisonment, but also those of the parents/carers on the outside. In Lowenstein's study (1986, pp. 81-82), one of the most common problems reported by mothers following fathers' imprisonment was that of deterioration in the mother-child relationship. There are a number of reasons why these relationships might suffer. First, it may be that remaining parents become scapegoats. As Crumley and Blumenthal found with children whose fathers were absent due to military service, the anger surrounding the separation often focuses on mothers (1973, as cited in Sack, 1977). Sack writes about six-year-old Danny who 'angrily accused his mother of allowing... [his father's imprisonment] to happen' (1977, p. 168). Second, a child may be unaccustomed to the remaining parent playing the role of disciplinarian (as already discussed) and this may cause trouble for their relationship. Third, the level of honesty with which parents on the outside initially explained the situation can have an impact on the extent of trust and respect that children have for these parents. Poehlmann found that children's feelings of attachment towards carers/remaining parents were more secure when children were given 'emotionally open and developmentally appropriate' information (2005b, p. 685). Of course, individual circumstances may vary and a child's relationship with a carer/parent on the outside may very well remain as it was prior to the incarceration. Nonetheless, it is yet another risk facing these children and families.

4.5 Breakdown in mother-father relationship

Incarceration during marriage significantly increases the risk of divorce or separation (see, for example, Lopoo & Western, 2005; Apel, Blokland, Nieuwbeerta & van Schellen, 2010), which may result in 'long term and chronic' negative outcomes for children (Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999, p. 140). Despite some indications that prolonged separation from a spouse is the main reason for such trends (Massoglia, Remster & King, 2011), Shaw pointed out that it is not necessarily incarceration alone that causes the risk of marital breakdown: 'In reality, numerous marriages are at breaking point at the time custody is imposed and the sentence only precipitates the event or provides the woman with a much needed escape route' (1992a, p. 47). Similarly, some mothers in Chui's study considered the incarceration of a partner to be a 'fantastic excuse' to end the marriage (2010, p. 201) and this might not seem surprising given that living with a criminal is hardly likely to be a happy experience. Patently some people choose such a life (Bonnie to somebody else's Clyde)²⁵ but others may drift into it without fully understanding the implication. That said, Shaw goes on to add: 'However, such cases were in the minority in... [this] study and imprisonment of a father must generally be viewed as an event likely to be painful and detrimental to any child [or family] involved' (1992a, p. 47).

However, regardless of the cause of the risk, parental divorce or separation may lead to additional stress or suffering for children of incarcerated parents. For example, Amato's research suggests that divorce or marital discord can result in children experiencing a lower level of psychological well-being, while divorce, in particular, is considered to have adverse effects on children's educational attainment (2006). The debate on this matter remains inconclusive, with some researchers finding results similar to Amato's (see, for example, Keith & Finlay, 1988; Biblarz & Gottainer, 2000) and others claiming that differences reported, for example, in

²⁵ The reference here is, of course, to the US Depression era bandits Bonnie Elizabeth Parker [1910-1934] and Clyde Chestnut Barrow [1909-1934], killed by Texas Rangers after a protracted spree of bank robberies and other crimes. Remembered (some might say romanticised) in a 1967 film and in other popular media (see, Treherne, 1984; Guinn, 2009), they have often been put forward as the paradigm examples of *hybristophilia*, a psychological condition in which one person is, or two or more people are (sometimes mutually), sexually aroused by the criminality and violence of another or others (Money, 1986). This supposed condition has sometimes come to be referred to colloquially as Bonnie and Clyde Syndrome.

educational attainment and behaviour were, in fact, present prior to divorce (see, for example, Cherlin et al., 1991; Sun & Li, 2001). Many others have suggested that, while there is an association between divorce and child adjustment or academic achievement, it is the various mediating factors that determine the level of disruption experienced by a child (see, for example, Demo & Acock, 1988; Simons, Lin, Gordon, Conger & Lorenz, 1999; Lansford, 2009). Overall, however, it may be reasonable to say that divorce/separation caused by one partner's imprisonment can make the situation worse for some children. In 1977 Sack suggested that 'whether or not the marriage remained intact seemed an important variable in the children's functioning during the imprisonment of their [sic] father' (p. 165), noting that those families in which separation followed the fathers' imprisonment appeared to have experienced 'frequent upheavals, physical abuse, and prior separations', with incarceration providing a convenient opportunity to end the marriage (p. 165). Thus, as previously stated in section 3.4.3, it could be that paternal incarceration marks, for some children, the beginning of a period of relative stability, which could intuitively render it more likely that more attention would be paid to a child's academic and social pursuits.

However, irrespective of whether parents actually separate or not, incarceration could damage relationships between mothers and fathers in such a way as to negatively affect parenting behaviours, specifically co-parenting behaviours. Research has indicated that the perceived quality of co-parenting alliances (for instance, whether parents collaborate effectively or undermine each other) when one parent is incarcerated can have implications for children's moods (Loper, Phillips, Nicholls and Dallaire, 2014) and behaviour (Cecil et al., 2008; see also Baker, McHale, Strozier and Cecil, 2010). In Loper et al.'s 2014 study, positive co-parenting alliances were associated with more positive mood indicators (eg, children being attentive) and negative co-parenting alliances were more commonly accompanied by symptoms of negative moods (eg, children being hostile). Similarly, in Baker et al.'s 2010 study of the co-parenting relationships between incarcerated mothers and their children's maternal grandmothers, more positive relationships were accompanied by fewer behavioural problems (eg, hyperactivity, defiance and/or aggression) on the part of children. Taking the examples mentioned above,

it is easy to imagine how children's academic lives might be affected by poor quality co-parenting alliances; for instance, attentiveness tends to be associated with good concentration skills while hostility and aggression are not generally conducive to positive social interactions in the school setting.

In addition, some believe the effects of imprisonment on co-parenting can extend beyond a father's release from prison. For example, Turney and Wildeman found that a father who had been recently incarcerated (when he had been living with a partner prior to incarceration) tended to experience lower levels of shared responsibility and cooperation with the child/children's mother than one who had not been recently incarcerated (2013) and Baker et al. assert that the quality of such post-release co-parenting relates to the quality of co-parenting *during* the incarceration (2010). Therefore, in the manner described above, poor co-parenting alliances could have *long-term* negative impacts on children's moods and behaviour, which could indirectly affect children's social interactions and educational attainment.

4.6 Financial strain

A child who has a parent in prison may be more likely than other children to experience those circumstances referred to as poverty, economic stress, financial strain or economic instability (Glover, 2009; Miller, 2006; Geller et al., 2009, respectively; see also Murray & Farrington, 2005; Phillips et al., 2006). Overall, the research suggests that imprisonment of a parent typically has a negative economic impact on a family (Morris, 1965; Sack, 1977; Bakker et al., 1978; King, 2002; Arditti et al., 2003; Smith, Grimshaw, Romeo & Knapp, 2007), with one American study in 2009 finding that the average reduction in family income was \$8,726 per year (Johnson). In Morris's 1965 study, 62.7% of wives reported that their financial situations had deteriorated since the incarceration of their husbands, while one mother (whose story was the subject of a newspaper article) reported that within five weeks of her husband's arrest the family business collapsed and she was forced to take a full-time job to support her children (Walsh, 2014). Here we might assume that the father was somebody who was a "first time" (and perhaps even "one time") offender, as opposed to being a "born and bred" criminal with multiple convictions.

In other words, he was unlikely to have been a recidivist (given that the family business had survived hitherto) and the circumstances of those children whose fathers belong in that category may need to be distinguished from those of “one time” offenders or habitual criminals who finally get caught. Essentially, the difference lies in the distinction between paternal criminality and paternal imprisonment and a child who experiences the former will not necessarily experience the latter. As McCullagh puts it, ‘it is possible... that those criminals who get arrested are either the less intelligent or less talented ones or those whom the gardaí²⁶ are most skilled at catching’ (1996, p. 25).

Prisoners’ families (especially those of habitual criminals) may have been at risk financially before incarceration (eg, Chung, 2011; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2011). Geller et al.’s examination of data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study in the United States found that, in general, children of fathers who had ever been incarcerated were more likely to have been born into economic hardship (2012), while other researchers have indicated that disadvantaged families or poorer families with low incomes are more likely to experience paternal incarceration (Shaw, 1992b; Geller et al., 2011). This means that further economic hardship can be added to existing disadvantage (Shaw, 1992a) and this may result in many families living well below the poverty line (eg, Arditti et al., 2003; Breen, 1995).

If we are to believe Farrington’s claims that ‘children from poorer families are more likely to offend because they are less able to achieve their goals legally’ it is possible that the same may also be true of adults (1989 cited in Shaw, 1992b, p. 198). Hence, Watts and Nightingale (1996) claim that incarceration can actually be seen as both a *result* of poverty and a *contributor* to financial adversity, a vicious circle, one might say. For example, a father who is the main income provider for his family may be experiencing financial difficulties that guide him towards a more illegal, but financially rewarding, line of “work”. However, while serving a prison sentence for such criminal activity, his wife/partner and children might reasonably be considered likely to borrow money as they struggle with the financial situation.

²⁶ The term ‘gardaí’ here refers to police officers. The Irish police force is called *An Garda Síochána* (literally, guardian of the peace). Gardaí is the plural of the Irish word garda.

When the father returns home, he is met with the original adverse financial conditions, along with, possibly, a hefty loan to repay and being, in effect, 'unemployable' (McCullagh, 1996, p. 205), the cycle starts again. For example, although having earned significant qualifications while in prison, Clinton found it almost impossible to secure employment upon release (Braman, 2004). He thought that his candour about his criminal record was, at least partially, to blame for this but did not wish to be deceptive with prospective employers and have the truth emerge at some point down the line when he had settled in a job. While staying with his sister and her children, he was aware of the costs his mother and sister were bearing due to his lack of employment: 'My family keeps giving me money... now, they short [sic] 'cause they're saying that the bills is [sic] catching up on them because they have to provide for me' (Braman, 2004, p. 148). Clinton also felt a sense of obligation towards his daughter and new grandchild:

you feel as though 'I'm supposed to be able to give my child some money...' And it's like going backwards, because every time I would sit there and look at... all of my accomplishments,... it made me feel good... But I can't get a damn job... And what that does, it makes you resort back to what you do best – what you feel as though you do best, what you know, and that is to break the law (Braman, 2004, p. 149).

On the other hand, despite what most of the research suggests, the removal of a parent from the home for the purposes of imprisonment *could* mean that a family's financial situation may improve. King (2002) notes that the Social Welfare system might actually provide families with a more stable income and we cannot deny that if a parent who had a drug or alcohol addiction was previously in charge of the money, his/her incarceration might allow for a more prudent distribution of funds within the family. On this point, one woman shared her experience online of living with a drug addict (albeit a son and not a partner):

I have spent thousands! Getting him out of debt with drug dealers, I work full time but my wage packet has his name on it! He kicks off, bullies me, blackmails me, he plays mind games with me, harasses me constantly for money to buy cannabis and now cocaine. When he has them he is a soft puppy.... but I can't take no more of this [sic], I will end up in a box, ahhh peace.... no more sleepless nights worrying if I have enough money for his habit (Scanners, 2014).

Nesmith and Ruhland encountered two similar cases in which caregivers reported that, prior to their imprisonment, the parents in question had been 'draining their [bank] accounts and selling their belongings' in order to fund their drug habits (2011, p. 113). Such stories highlight the potential (financial and other) benefits for women in such circumstances of having a drug addict removed from the home.

The economic risk associated with incarceration may, in many cases, be attributed to the family's main income provider (albeit that the income may be the proceeds of crime) being removed from the home and the resultant reduction in household income (as noted by Bakker et al., 1978; Geller et al., 2012; Chui, 2010). This can have a 'significant impact' on families (Miller, 2006, p. 475). Alternatively, even in instances in which income remains somewhat stable, mismanagement of financial resources might result in money being unavailable for necessities. For example, a caregiver in Nesmith and Ruhland's study pointed out that her partner was far more competent than she was when it came to budgeting (2011). Describing herself as a 'frivolous spender', she recalled having to return clothes she had bought for the children when she realised her phone connection had been cut off due to an overdue bill (2011, p. 113). There is evidence to suggest that there are financial implications for families even in the case of fathers who are not living/in close contact with their children prior to incarceration. For example, cessation of social welfare benefit or maintenance payments can further decrease a household's income (eg, Geller et al., 2011; King, 2002).

In addition to the reduction of household income, economic risk may be intensified. This can come about as a result of:

the enhanced likelihood of mothers leaving paid work outside the home, the unavailability or loss of child support [or other benefit entitlements, childcare], and new expenses associated with incarceration including the sharing of scarce financial resources with the inmate [as well as attorney costs and visiting the prisoner] (Arditti et al., 2003, p. 200).

Sometimes fathers are imprisoned far away and mothers, or whoever may be looking after the child(ren) concerned, must take time off work to visit, which can serve to deepen the financial burden. These additional costs have been described

by researchers such as Hairston (1998), Murray (2005), Glover (2009) and Martyn (2012) as having the effect of further diminishing families' financial resources. Chung has pointed out that the length of a sentence can affect the severity of the economic burden, with lengthy incarceration posing 'particularly challenging problems for economically vulnerable families' (2011, p. 577). Having said this, in Ireland partners of those who are sentenced for (or have served) less than six months are not eligible to apply for the One-Parent Family Payment (Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection [hereafter DEASP], 2017b)²⁷ and a lengthier sentence might, in some cases, be more desirable from a financial point of view, though it could seem perverse to say so.

Sometimes the financial situation becomes so dire that 'older children may have to assume unexpected responsibilities and be diverted from school in order to conserve and supplement household income' (Foster & Hagan, 2007, p. 402). This may mean either leaving school at the earliest legal age or truanting to take up work, though such arrangements may have become less common by the early twenty-first century than in the nineteenth or even early twentieth centuries, with more elaborate provision for monitoring school attendance becoming the norm over time. Often, remaining parents/guardians are forced either to leave employment to care for children or to take on additional work (Breen, 2010; King, 2002), which means that children may again experience changes in their routine and less attention, adding to the instability and isolation that they are already experiencing.

The effects paternal imprisonment can have on a child's education are clear to see. Even when a child is not being removed from school to visit his/her father, there can be:

problems of socialization associated with father's incarceration and absence from the household, as well as economic strains of low family income and unemployment... [all] early parts of the cumulative disadvantage process that diminish the educational success of children (Foster & Hagan, 2007, p. 421).

²⁷ The One-Parent Family Payment is a government allowance available to men and women under the age of 66 who are raising children 'without the support of a partner' (DEASP, 2017b). In order to qualify for this allowance on the basis of parental imprisonment, spouses or civil partners in prison must have been sentenced to 'at least 6 months in prison or have spent at least 6 months in custody' (DEASP, 2017b).

Some research indicates that the financial effects of paternal incarceration are 'long lasting and large' (Wildeman, 2010, p. 286) and while it is true that 'economic stability is only one aspect of child well-being' (Geller et al., 2011, p. 45), a consensus has emerged since at least the 1990s to the effect that economic disadvantage is associated with development problems (see, for example, Luby et al, 2013; McLoyd, 1998; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Kiernan & Huerta, 2008). In other words, persistent poverty can have 'more detrimental effects on I[n]telligence] Q[uiotient], school achievement, and socioemotional functioning than transitory poverty' (McLoyd, 1998, p. 185). Indeed, at the very least, financial problems can result in children being unable to attend events/activities that may be of social benefit (King, 2002). The ramifications of all of the above can result in a 'cycle of deprivation which repeats itself from generation to generation' (King, 2002, p. 5).

4.7 Stress on the remaining caregiver

Understandably, a man's incarceration can have an enormous impact on his wife/partner's life or on the life of the person who assumes responsibility for his children when this person is not his wife/partner.²⁸ Many of these people (who are typically women) report experiencing grief, shame, anger, anxiety, emotional stress, loneliness, sexual frustration and poor physical and mental health (see, for example, Morris, 1965; Arditti et al., 2003; Turanovic, Rodriguez & Pratt, 2012; Wildeman, Schnittker & Turney, 2012; Chui, 2016a). Sack noted the apparent isolation and depression experienced by women in his study (1977), while Bakker et al. claim that women whom they encountered 'thought themselves to be isolated, abandoned, embarrassed, and hopeless' (1978, p. 147). Another woman recalled, two years into her husband's sentence, eventually visiting her GP, who prescribed antidepressants (Walsh, 2014) and she may well have been typical of many more in the same situation.²⁹ In Morris's in-depth (albeit dated) study prisoners' wives reported deteriorations in financial circumstances (63.7%), work (81%), social activity

²⁸ According to Hairston's review for the Annie E. Casey Foundation in the United States in 2007, 90% of children whose fathers are incarcerated in state prisons (and 92% of children whose fathers are incarcerated in federal prisons) live with their mothers.

²⁹ In Hong Kong, 57% of the caregivers in Chui's research were found to be suffering from borderline to severe depression (2016a).

(62.8%), relationships with in-laws (59.8%) and relationships with neighbours and friends (56.9%; 1965). Having to contend with the pressures of possible financial difficulties and social isolation, while attempting to assume additional responsibilities, maintain contact with the imprisoned parent and deal with their children's emotional and behavioural reactions to the event (as well as their own) can result in the carers being overworked and under extreme physical and mental pressure. They may be so preoccupied that they are, for their children, 'physically present but "emotionally" absent' (Bowlby, 1973, p. 43) and their stresses, in turn, may be transmitted to children, affecting their behaviour or overall adjustment to the parent's imprisonment (see Morris, 1967; Lowenstein, 1986; Mackintosh, Myers & Kennon, 2006; Chui, 2016a).

Over the course of Nesmith and Ruhland's research it emerged that sometimes children 'were in fact keenly attuned to their caregivers' stress and often worked to ease it by taking on adult responsibilities' (2008, p. 1124). This may entail caring for younger siblings or perhaps, in the case of boys, being the "man of the house" (a somewhat vaguer move that could imply everything from killing spiders in the bath to getting paid work). Stanton (researching *maternal* imprisonment) found that girls assumed additional responsibilities in the home following maternal incarceration while boys did not (1980) and this could be indicative of gendered expectations though it might bear saying that a gap of 37 years between Stanton's work and the time of writing may have seen some change in these. Mel, a 17-year-old girl in Australia, stated:

Since dad's been away my grades have dropped dramatically. Just trying to find time to do homework – homework's hard to do, because I never have time to do it, I'm always running around for everybody else trying to, you know, taking mum grocery shopping, taking her here, taking her there (quoted in Saunders & Barry, 2013, p. 4).

Although Mel does not meet the age criteria for this study, a younger child in a similar situation could acquire increased responsibility in the household in much the same way and be robbed of a childhood as a result (which is how one 14-year-old described the experience; Ormiston Children & Families Trust, 2007). Sometimes an awareness of a parent's distress can lead to a child "bottling up"

his/her own in an attempt to avoid increasing a mother's anxiety (Chui, 2010) and such vicarious negative feelings may compound the child's own feelings of loss or anxiety (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008).

There has been some evidence produced to support claims that 'remaining carers might experience reduced capacity to support and supervise children' when a parent is sent to prison (Murray & Farrington, 2005, p. 1270) and that caregivers in such circumstances might resort to less effective parenting practices, such as harsh or inconsistent discipline or neglect in extreme cases (see Turney, 2014; King, 2002) or, at another extreme, overprotective parenting (Phillips et al., 2006), although it must be said that the latter does not appear often in the literature. One prisoner in King's study was told by his partner that 'there was no family structure or routines in the household any more' (2002, p. 33), which could be typical of many such families. Reduction in free time caused, for example, by extra work, stress, reduction in household income and many other factors might all combine to result in the remaining parent devoting less time, effort and money to monitoring a child's movements and/or friends, planning nutritional meals, attending regular medical check-ups, building a supportive relationship with the child, etc. For example, Mary (albeit not a partner of a prisoner) found that,

as the demands of raising a child as a single mother and working a low wage job closed in, [she]... slipped into depression and, ultimately, drug use. Her patience with [her son] Toby was short, and she was easily upset when he cried, even resorting to slapping him when he wouldn't stop crying as a toddler (Arditti, 2012, pp. 23-24).

One childcare worker in the Visitors' Centre of Mountjoy prison noticed the stress that many caregivers were under and said:

you see them coming in with buggies and loads of kids and they're stressed out and shouting at the kids... They're telling them to shut up and they talk to them quite harshly when they're outside (quoted in King, 2002, p. 47).

Although such parenting practices have been observed with children of imprisoned parents, it is not clear if these had changed due to incarceration or if they had always been so (Murray & Farrington, 2008a). Either way, there have been links drawn between parental stress and poor supervision in one-parent families and later

criminality or deviance (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990 cited in McCullagh, 1996, p. 46). One-parent families ought not to be treated as a synonym for *problem* family but, as Arditti et al. (2003) have previously pointed out, there are specific challenges facing the particular type of one-parent family to which we refer here and these challenges can pose an additional threat to mothers', and by implication, children's wellbeing. Of course, it remains unknowable whether women effectively forced into being what were once called grass widows (separated from husbands by circumstances so the latter might as well have been dead) are rendered worse mothers as a result.

The way in which a parent/caregiver behaves towards a child and his/her level of accessibility and responsiveness is very important and has implications for, amongst other things, a child's attachment and sense of security (Poehlmann 2005b; see also Bowlby, 1973; Sroufe, 2005). With one parent gone, the remaining parent and how he/she parents is of even greater significance because, as Bowlby said in 1988, 'changes in the way a child is treated can shift his [sic] pathway in either a more favourable direction or less favourable one' (p. 136). Lowenstein considers a mother's (and, presumably any other carer's) coping skills to be affected by her age, her level of education, the level of family solidarity prior to a father's imprisonment and the family's ties to support networks, concluding that, following paternal incarceration, the extent of a mother's adeptness at coping had a greater impact on a child's adjustment than the separation itself (1986). Lamb et al. (1985) asserted that stress may impede a mother/caregiver's ability 'to guide and stimulate their children's learning' (cited in Bisnaire, Firestone & Rynard, 1990, p. 68). Mackintosh et al. found that children who experienced more warmth from their carers during the imprisonment of their mothers were considered to suffer from fewer internalising and externalising problems (2006). If we change mothers for carers and fathers for mothers we might conclude that a mother who shows warmth towards the child[ren] while a father is in prison may go a long way to ensuring that the experience is bearable.

4.8 Explanations given to children for a parent's absence

Shaw asserts that, when it comes to a parent's incarceration, 'what and how children are told is one of the most important issues over which parents have some control' (1988, p. 14). Just over 61% of parents in Irish prisons stated their children were unaware of the fact of the parent being in prison (King, 2002).³⁰ This figure was significantly lower – 17% – in McEvoy et al.'s study of the families of politically-motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland (1999), a difference one might attribute to the reduced stigma typically experienced by such families (Rolston & Tomlinson, 1986; Hughes, 1989; Coulter, 1991 as cited in McEvoy et al., 1999). In Shaw's UK study, a third of the children in the sample were told lies to explain absences and a further third were told nothing at all (1992a). However, Sack et al. found significantly lower levels of deception in their research in the United States (1976) and this may be because a criminal sentence is harder to hide in the U.S. where such things (except in the case of minors) are always matters of public record, though some prominent figures there have evidently succeeded in keeping their children ignorant. Often, children 'are not given honest and developmentally sensitive explanations' regarding a parent's incarceration (Murray et al., 2012, p. 178). There is a tendency to concoct stories or explain the imprisonment in some other way. For example, some parents/caregivers tell children that the father is away working, in the navy or the army, on extended vacations/holidays or in hospital (King, 2002; Shaw, 1987; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2011; McEvoy et al., 1999). When the writer known as O Henry, William Sydney Porter [1862-1910], was, in 1898, imprisoned for three years in Ohio Penitentiary on charges relating to embezzlement, his daughter was told he was away on business; she reportedly went to her grave without having discovered otherwise (Stacey, 2010). While such long-term deception might be less easily accomplished or maintained in 2017 (due to technological advances, more invasive media reporting and increased transparency in general), some appear to aspire to it.

³⁰ It is worth noting that 68.4% of caregivers on the outside reported that the children in their care were unaware of this fact (King, 2002). No matching between parents and caregivers took place in this study and the difference in statistics could also be attributed to different size samples (26 as compared to 19, respectively).

Adults give a variety of reasons for not telling their children the truth about their parents' incarceration; they may feel that the child is too young to understand (see, for example, Bakker et al, 1978; King, 2002; Chui & Yeung, 2016) or that the knowledge would cause the children to think that 'prison is an acceptable outcome' (Glover, 2009, p. 8). One father was afraid that his son would think 'Oh, me [sic] daddy was in jail, I'll go to jail' (quoted in King, 2002, p. 30). Some parents, concerned about how others might react, may be trying to emotionally or psychologically protect their children (Miller, 2006; Hairston, 1991; King, 2002), to prevent them from being embarrassed, bullied or stigmatised (eg, Bakker et al, 1978).

Many caregivers plan to tell the children after sentencing but 'as time passes, it may become more difficult to raise the issue... [with the effect that] the deception continues' (Ormiston Children & Families Trust, 2007, p. 19). Perhaps in certain cases there also is some desire to ensure the child's perception of the parent is good. Finally, the outside parent/caregiver[s] may simply not feel able to talk about it. As Bocknek et al. put it: 'Caregivers often do not openly discuss the situation with children because... [they] may feel angry, afraid, or unable to do so' (2009, p. 324). For example, a mother who is upset but attempting to be strong for her children's sake may not want to discuss the imprisonment for fear of breaking down in front of them and causing further anxiety or stress. Typically, 'whether and what a child is told often has more to do with the needs and feelings of the adults around them than with the needs and feelings of the child' (Moore, 1992, pp. 170-171).

However, 'even when caregivers' intentions are good, they lack insight into the potentially detrimental consequences for [sic] misleading a child' (Miller, 2006, p. 476). The unexplained (or insufficiently explained) absence of a parent can give rise to anxiety on the part of a child. One boy was told that his mother was being hospitalised but, when he heard that other children could visit their mothers in hospital, he became convinced his mother had died. It was not until he was told the truth that he believed his grandmother's assurances she was not dead (Stanton, 1980). (I deal with this issue further in section 5.4 – *Fear, anxiety and guilt*.) Alternatively, lack of information may lead children to blame themselves. For

example, one ten-year-old boy recounted his thoughts three years previously: 'I thought... that he'd gone away because he hated me or I'd done something to make him run away from us' (Kemp, 1995) and the effect of such beliefs on a child's self-esteem can be extremely damaging.

Sometimes parents intend to tell their children the truth in the future (eg, King, 2002) but unfortunately, in the meantime, children may hear the real reason for a father's absence from an alternative source, such as official prison correspondence/signs, a classmate, or from someone who assumes the child knows the truth. For example, Wilmer, Marks and Pogue reported a case of a child on a prison visit stating 'Mama, P-R-I-S-O-N doesn't spell hospital' (1966), while Danny (aged 6) became aware of his father's imprisonment when a neighbour showed him his father's picture in the local paper (Sack, 1977). When this happens, the likelihood is that the news will not be delivered in as delicate a manner as it would be from a caring parent and Lloyd asserts that the 'potential loss of trust between parent and child if the child were to find out the truth indirectly' could cause additional suffering to the child (1992, p. 187). The child might concoct any number of stories to explain why the truth was hidden, with 'to protect me' probably being the least likely. In the child's eyes, a parent might lose credibility entirely and the child may start looking for alternative people to trust. As Miller states: 'deception leads to confusion, distrust, and uncertainty' (2006, p. 476) and there may be implications for their attachment security (Poehlmann, 2005b). One woman who experienced maternal incarceration as a child feels that the repercussions of such dishonesty can have long-lasting effects: 'the deceitfulness you experience just breeds major trust issues for years... decades... forever' (Allard & Greene, 2011, p. 27).

In cases such as these a child, understandably, will have many questions, which might (depending on the circumstances) go unanswered and children may be denied the opportunity to discuss the imprisonment and their feelings about it. Emotions may be repressed as a child feels unable to speak to the remaining parent about the secret he/she has uncovered. Indeed, in King's study, participants talked about children knowing the truth but pretending not to, as the subject had not been

broached by their caregivers (2002). It is then that the child's imagination may go into overdrive and, as Shaw points out, 'this can lead to exaggerated fears as to the reason for father's absence' (1987, p. 15).

Vague explanations can also cause considerable anxiety for the children involved. Bocknek et al. described one case as follows:

Joe reports that his father told Joe that he, Joe's father, is in prison because he was 'in the wrong place at the wrong time'. This abstract concept has left Joe feeling unsafe, and he reported fearing he too could be in the wrong place at the wrong time and tries to figure out how to prevent this from happening (2009, p. 329).

Some parents/caregivers, however, tell children the truth. There are a variety of reasons why they may choose to do so. Some, realising that 'often such charades are not sustainable' (Raeder, 2012, p. 28) and fearing that the children may find out from another source (as discussed above) and others favouring the option of controlling what the children hear and having the opportunity to explain the situation themselves in a sensitive manner to allay any fears or doubts the children may have. Others see it as a chance to discourage (and emphasise the repercussions of) any similar actions on the part of the child (at the time or later in life) and some simply do not believe that it will have an impact on the child, perhaps because, as one mother in Bakker et al.'s study said in reference to her children; 'they already knew their father was "no good" ' (1978, p. 147). Of course, children who witness the arrest of a father are often denied the opportunity to have the situation explained to them in a calm and appropriate manner (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2011).

Shaw claims that, 'whether or not parents tell their children the truth, the way in which they communicate with them and how they explain [a] father's absence is arguably one of the most important factors of imprisonment over which they have some control' (1987, p. 40). For example, telling a child that a father has done something bad and must go to prison for a while as punishment might make sense to the child, as he/she will (most likely) have experienced a similar situation in which doing something bad resulted in being prevented from doing or having something. However, telling a child that the police took the father away and not

explaining why may lead the child to doubt the motives of the police and may produce feelings of anger or frustration (which could then be directed towards the police). The quality of the explanations children receive is thus critical to their levels of understanding and can have an impact on how they cope thereafter. As Murray puts it: 'explanations given to children about... [the] parent's absence are likely to mediate the effects of the imprisonment' (2005, p. 451).

4.9 Social implications of parental incarceration

As to the indirect effects of parental imprisonment, it has been claimed that 'the reactions of others is a common problem' (Bakker et al, 1978, p. 143). Much of this can be attributed to the social stigma or moralising attached to imprisonment (eg, Lowenstein, 1986; Condry, 2007), which Arditti et al. say 'intensifies the potential of harm for families' (2003, p. 196). There is a proverb (thought to be of Nigerian heritage) that states: "It takes a whole village to raise a child" (Afriprov, 1998), suggesting that the successful rearing of a child is not only dependent on the actions/input of parents or family members, but of whole communities. When a child experiences stigma or discrimination in his/her neighbourhood, in the media and at school, there can be a number of adverse effects, some of which are detailed in this section. Pellegrini asserts that by explaining social problems such as crime, poverty and delinquency in terms of *individual* failure rather than *societal* issues, 'attention is diverted from the origins of these problems, thereby absolving society as a whole from any responsibility' (1991, pp. 4-5). However, on reviewing the literature, the role that society plays in isolating children of incarcerated parents is clear.

4.9.1 Stigma/Shame

Stigma is a term used, in a variety of contexts and for a variety of reasons, to describe the negative or disapproving light in which a person is viewed. It may have implications for a person's reputation and can have an impact on how others treat the person. Having reviewed the literature on fatherless homes, Herzog and Sudia point out that 'the more the fatherlessness is viewed with social disfavour, the stronger the adverse effects on the children' (1969, as cited in Sack, 1977, p. 172). Stigmatisation, in this instance, refers to 'the direction of feelings of hostility toward

and lack of respect given to the inmate and his family' (Bakker et al, 1978, p. 143) and may result in the children, or even the whole family feeling shame, embarrassment and fear of rejection or discrimination. (These issues are discussed variously in Miller, 2006; Vacca, 2008; Chui, 2010; Phillips & Gates, 2011; Martyn, 2012).

Boswell and Wedge assert that the manner in which stigma spreads from the prisoner to those around him/her can result in family members being 'sentenced' as a result of their close associations (2002, p. 11). This was substantiated by Nesmith and Ruhland's research, in which one mother explained: 'lots of people think that when you have somebody that's [sic] in jail... you're bad too.... they think that you accepted or condoned [the crime] and that's not true' (2011, p. 113; see also Morris, 1965). Inasmuch as a partner's acceptance or condoning of a crime may be the case in some instances, it ought not to be automatically assumed, as seems to be implied here. Nonetheless, the bulk of literature seems to indicate that the children of incarcerated parents are often marked with a negative label (Boswell & Wedge, 2002) and perceived as "outlaws" themselves (Foster & Hagan, 2007, p. 403) due to the 'sticky' nature of stigma (Braman, 2004, p. 173). Thus, the child is presented with 'the dual dilemma of coming to grips with anxieties associated with the loss of ... [a] father or mother as well as dealing with the stigma associated with the imprisonment of a family member' (Fritsch & Burkhead, 1981, p. 87). This might be a mammoth task for anybody, but especially so for a child.

Condry states that, within the 'web' of familial shame (2007, p. 69), stigma may stem from the notions of kin contamination: being associated with or related to the inmate, and kin culpability: being in some way to blame or responsible for the offender's actions and/or guilty of not severing contact after the illegal act. Either can lead families to believe that they must justify their continuing relationships with offenders (Condry, 2007). Alternatively, they may avoid relations with the incarcerated family member (Arditti et al, 2003).

Condry claims that children 'will not be given responsibility for the actions of adults, and hence their stigma is constructed only around contamination' (2007, p. 89). In other words, she believes that children will not, generally, be stigmatised in such a way as to suggest they are to blame for the father's criminal acts ('kin culpability'), but may be stigmatised simply for being related to him ('kin contamination').

However, Condry's notion of 'kin contamination' implies that, in this case, the child is somehow sullied, perhaps indefinitely, simply for having a father incarcerated and, thus, has the potential to contaminate others around him/her. Deep-seated prejudices on the subject, expressed in such folk psychology as saying "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree" and so forth may mean that many people consider a criminal's child more likely to grow up to be a criminal (and to be likely to involve others in illegal acts) than the child of a non-criminal. Indeed, research by Murray and Farrington in 2005 found that approximately 65% of boys who experienced parental imprisonment between birth and 10 went on to be convicted between the ages of 17 and 25, in some measure vindicating the folk psychology, though such issues are complicated and not easily reduced to any formula (p. 1273). The point made by Frederick Wines at the Illinois Conference of Charities is, however, interesting. He said: 'we make criminals out of children who are not criminals by treating them as if they were criminals' (as quoted in Platt, 1969, p. 132). In other words, by stigmatising these children we are essentially promoting such statistics. After all, if they already feel inferior and have experienced the social disadvantages of being criminally 'contaminated', what do they stand to lose if they actually seek some of the (material) advantages of a criminal lifestyle?

Fritsch and Burkhead have stated that 'parental absence is a multi-dimensional variable which takes on added meaning depending on whether the child believes the parent is absent for socially acceptable reasons or for reasons which carry a stigma' (1981, p. 87). For example, a parent being absent for the purpose of serving his/her country in the military forces can stimulate quite a different reaction to having a parent who is absent due to imprisonment and these reactions can have an impact on a child's adjustment. In the same manner, we might suspect that the *reason* for a parent's imprisonment can also play a part in determining how effectively a child

adapts to the situation. This may be true of different types of crime as 'some kinds of offence incur less moral condemnation than others' (Walker, 1980, pp. 156-157). Roughly, knowing that your father is in prison for non-payment of fines for parking offences or television licence evasion may cause fewer problems than his being a convicted murderer.

Having said this, as McCullagh points out, there is a tendency to consider a criminal tough, aggressive and dangerous regardless of the type of crime he/she has committed (1996, p. 48). Thus, while a child might gain some solace in the fact that his/her father is 'only' a tax-defaulter, it is unlikely that strangers (initially at least) will make this distinction on hearing the whereabouts of the child's father. In 1986 Lowenstein's findings confirmed a relationship between the extent to which a child copes with a parent's being in prison and the nature of the crime(s) and society's views on the matter, stating that the effects of stigmatisation were considerable for those families in which the father was convicted of a moral crime such as a sexual offence. As one mother put it: 'it's not even the fact that [father] is in here, it's what he's in for' (quoted in King, 2002, p. 43). Contrary to Walker's theory however, Lowenstein found that children whose fathers were sentenced for white-collar crimes were the *most* exposed to the effects of stigmatisation and explained this by saying:

Since these were mainly middle-class families with no criminal involvement prior to the present arrest of the father, the trauma was much more intense, especially so because the children had no prior exposure to any criminal involvement of the fathers (1986, p. 83).

There has been some speculation that imprisonment of a parent may carry less of a stigma in some instances due to socio-economic, or perhaps even cultural, factors (Cho, 2009b; Wilbur et al., 2007; Murray et al., 2007) and, correspondingly, more of a stigma in others. One mother stated that the situation was more difficult for her daughter because 'the family lived in an area where it would be very uncommon for anyone to be in prison or to ever have had a prison sentence' (King, 2002, p. 43). It has been suggested that reduced stigma may be evident in 'impoverished communities or crime-infested neighborhoods' where imprisonment is common enough to be seen as a normal event (Miller, 2006, p. 477; see also Schwartz &

Weintraub, 1974). However, as Wright and Seymour point out, in situations where this may be the case, the trauma children in such neighbourhoods must endure can mean that their lives are already severely disrupted/unstable and so reduced stigma is 'no gift' (2002, p. 12).

By contrast, Braman suggests that stigma may, in fact, be higher in such neighbourhoods, given that many of the residents might be the victims of such crimes (2004). In their Swedish study, Murray et al. concluded that there was no significant difference in the effects of parental incarceration on working-class children as compared with middle- or upper-class children (2007). Perhaps middle- or upper-class families, while possibly suffering from the effects of greater stigmatisation, may not experience the same level of economic risk as working-class families, who, in turn, may not be exposed to stigmatisation to the same extent (see Murray & Farrington, 2008b). Murray, Janson and Farrington noted that Sweden simply might have more 'sympathetic attitudes toward crime and punishment' (2007, p. 146). Dallaire and Wilson also highlighted the importance of acknowledging that different communities and cultures may have different 'societal attitudes towards crime' (2010, p. 406). One possibility is that 'traditional' attitudes towards crime (and, by implication, imprisonment) in some working-class communities have changed, in relative terms, quite abruptly since the 1980s. Communities such as inner-city Detroit are sometimes said to have been hollowed out – physically, economically and morally – as employment prospects there crashed in and after the 1980s. Those who could, left; those who could not, remained and some may have become reconciled to criminality as a way of life (see, for example, Hackney, 2011; LeDuff, 2011, especially pp. 107-125).

Having a parent in prison might even be viewed as a status symbol or "badge of honour" (Shlafer, Gerrity, Ruhland, Wheeler & Michaels, 2013). As one seven-year-old put it: 'Sometimes it's good saying my dad's in jail, the other kids think I'm hard, or if they skit...[tease] me... I say, "Watch out! When my dad comes home, he'll sort you out" ' (quoted in Amira, 1992, p. 87). This might reflect an attitude to crime similar to that found in the invented hierarchy of crime (the worse you are, the more people respect you) and, certainly, in cases such as these, parental imprisonment

may be considered a source of pride. But another instance in which imprisonment of a family member might seem admirable (aside from the context of the Irish Republic Army [IRA])³¹ might be in cases where protesters are sentenced to prison following demonstrations for reasons deemed worthy by the public. For example, one Shell to Sea activist³² from Mayo served more than five months in prison in 2010 and, in 2015 four protesters against water charges³³ were imprisoned – two for four weeks and two for 56 days - when they refused formally to agree to remain 20 metres or more away from water meter installation workers (Lally, 2015).

Nonetheless, in my review of the literature, I encountered this apparent sense of pride only on the part of the children and never on the part of adults and, in fact, one caregiver was quite concerned that her children thought having a criminal father was something of which to be proud (King, 2002, p. 43). An eight-year-old boy who was clearly not embarrassed about his uncle's arrest told others: 'the police came after him in a helicopter – it landed on the green outside our house. It was brilliant – everyone came out to look' (Ormiston Children & Families Trust, 2007, p. 17). But it may be unwise to generalise about this. Thus, Nesmith and Ruhland noted that none of the children in their study 'evinced any signs of this', instead being 'keenly aware of negative assumptions that might be made about them because they had a parent in prison' (2008, p. 1123).

³¹ The Irish Republican Army (IRA), a group that until January 1919 was referred to as the Irish Volunteers, was formed during Ireland's struggle for independence from Britain in 1916-1921 (Coogan, 1980). Even though the "Provisional" faction of the group (formed in 1969 and the most active faction after that year; Foster, 1989) went on to become infamous for its violent attacks on both military and civilian targets, its members, even when imprisoned, were often highly esteemed and celebrated by their families and communities who considered their crimes and punishments admirable sacrifices made in the interest of national pride.

³² Shell to Sea is an organisation which was set up in County Mayo in 2005 to oppose the proposed construction of a gas pipeline (to contain raw natural gas) and a gas refinery in the county. Seeing the project as a threat to the environment and the health and safety of residents/visitors, the group campaigned for the gas (from the Corrib gas field) to be refined at sea. The name of the organisation refers to one of the main companies involved in the proposed construction, ie, Royal Dutch Shell. Despite many Shell to Sea protests, the first of six wellheads opened in December 2015. For further details (though these may be less than impartial in some respects) see: www.shelltosea.com.

³³ Water charges were introduced for the first time in Ireland in 2014 and the decision (largely viewed as an austerity measure) was met with widespread anger from the Irish people. Demonstrations took place all over the country and, by the time of writing, water charges had been suspended.

Despite some parents' opinions that their children might be too young to feel the effects of stigmatisation (King, 2002; Bakker et al., 1978), Miller has asserted that most children are aware of society's disapproval of criminal behaviour (2006). This was reflected in research by Bandura and Walters, in which children who had imitated a well-known baseball player ceased to do so on realising that he was a convicted criminal (1963, as cited in Stanton, 1980). Even younger children who may not be 'cognizant of the stigma attached to incarceration' (Wildeman, 2010, p. 287) may suffer indirectly as a result of it. For example, partners of incarcerated men often withdraw from family, friends and other social networks in an attempt to avoid having to discuss the incarceration, as was the case for Louisa in Braman's research (2004), with the result that they often end up reducing the number of people in the children's (and in their own) support systems (Wildeman, 2010). In addition to this, stigma may prevent families from seeking public financial assistance or other forms of professional help, which may benefit the child academically through financial and emotional means (eg, in the form of support groups; see Arditti et al, 2003; Boswell & Wedge, 2002; Chui, 2010).

Parental stigmatisation has been identified as one of the ways in which prisoners' children are socially excluded (see, for example, Murray, 2007), with some children indicating that 'the isolation occurred directly because of their parents' incarceration' (Bocknek et al., 2009, p. 328). Social exclusion can have any number of repercussions for children who experience it. With other incarceration-related variables, it 'can lead to children taking on deviant self-identification', have long-term effects on children's development and may 'damage a child's educational attainment prospects' (respectively Breen, 2010, p. 52; King, 2002; Foster & Hagan, 2007, p. 412). Being socially excluded is, despite what is implied by the term, not simply a social issue. Edwards claims that feeling 'abandoned, ostracised, or stigmatised... may be partly responsible for... [a child's] social-emotional distress and problems functioning in school' (2009, p. 268). When children are unhappy or upset their concentration levels can be reduced as they try to figure out how they can ameliorate the situation. Their minds can become fixated on the social issue, to the expense of academic performance. Some older children may cease attending formal education due to stigmatisation, as did one 12-year-old in Chui's study

(2010). To put the whole thing in slightly different terms, ‘social exclusion resulting from the imprisonment of parents may extend through the lives of their children in unanticipated ways, especially through educational detainment’ (Foster & Hagan, 2007, p. 400).

While previous research had indicated that children of incarcerated parents may experience stigmatisation in school, Dallaire et al. were surprised to find, when interviewing teachers, that ‘in all the instances that stigmatization was mentioned, the teachers referred to other teachers as the source’, rather than the children’s peers (2010, p. 285; see also Wildeman, Scardamalia, Walsh, O’Brien & Brew, 2017). Participants in the study spoke of witnessing colleagues being ‘unsupportive’, ‘unprofessional’ and ‘expecting less from children with incarcerated parents’; Dallaire et al. asserted that it was as if they believed their attempts to assist these children would be futile and so they tended simply to ‘forget them’ (2010, p. 284; see also Thacker, Strudwick & Babbedge, 2002).

In a well-known study in 1966, Rosenthal and Jacobson examined the effect that teachers’ expectations of the intellectual abilities of students had on the students’ actual intellectual gains over the course of an academic year. The researchers chose students at random and, following a ‘test for intellectual blooming’, informed the teachers that these students were likely to display unusual gains over the year (1966, p. 116). Other children of equal intelligence were chosen to make up a comparison group. The first group of students went on to show significantly greater gains in IQ than did the children in the control group, suggesting that teachers’ expectations play a role in determining the level of success children experience academically. Rosenthal and Jacobson speculated that, due to their expectations, teachers might somehow behave in such a manner as to encourage the realisation of these expectations (1966).

Teachers’ lowered expectations for children of incarcerated parents, ‘conveyed to the pupil through verbal and non-verbal means’ (Thacker et al., 2002, p. 18)³⁴ are essentially another form of stigmatisation and may influence children’s academic

³⁴ Thacker et al.’s research did not relate specifically to pupils with incarcerated parents (2002).

achievements, if the latter group begins to give up on long-term goals and see academic achievement as meaningless (Reckdahl, 2015). As one social worker put it: “They think: “If I don’t have a future, why do I need to be concerned with the present?”” (Reckdahl, 2015, p. 15). Amira suggested that a child may be ‘forced into an unconscious pattern of behavioural conformity’ at school (1992, p. 89). Such patterns might further be influenced by the child’s low expectations of him/herself (Amira, 1992), by teachers’ low expectations of him/her (Dallaire et al., 2010) or by teachers’ negative perceptions of the child’s ability (Turney & Haskins, 2014).

However, Jussim and Harber found the extent of the effect of teachers’ expectations on children’s actual outcomes to be generally modest (2005). Nonetheless, they noted that ‘self-fulfilling prophecies occur more frequently among students from stigmatized backgrounds’ (2005, p. 144). They go on to suggest that ‘in certain contexts and among certain groups’, these self-fulfilling prophecies are ‘consistently powerful and pervasive’ (2005, p. 153). In contrast to this, Cho suggested that sympathetic teachers may be more likely to offer additional support to, or ‘promote’, children whose mothers enter prison (2009b, p. 20; see also Moore, 1988; Roberts & Loucks, 2015). If this were true, it could be possible that children of incarcerated fathers may experience similar support, but we might assume that this very much depends on circumstances and the “luck of the draw” and we cannot, therefore, rule out the possibility that by identifying these children in a school context we, in fact, may be increasing their risk of stigmatisation and, thereby, reinforcing the ‘discrimination... [that] is an everyday reality in many children’s lives’ (Great Britain Department of Health, 1990, p. 11).

4.9.2 Keeping the secret from others

In order to avoid being stigmatised and in addition to coping with the other challenges that parental absence/imprisonment entails, families often attempt to keep their situation a secret from friends, neighbours, extended family or teachers (eg, King, 2002; Braman, 2004; see also Meek, 2008; Brown, Dibb, Shenton & Elson, 2001). In some cases it is the parents and/or caregivers who instruct children to keep the incarceration a secret for fear of how they or the children will be perceived or treated if people know the truth (Glover, 2009; Sack et al. 1976; King, 2002;

Bakker et al., 1978). In Nesmith and Ruhland's study, it emerged that the children often considered it a necessity or a 'family expectation' to keep one's family business private, even if they wanted to share the secret (2008, p. 1123; see also Stanton, 1980).

Aside from some parents desiring the secret to be kept, a *child* can also be reluctant to reveal the truth about a parent's absence (Martyn, 2012; Stanton, 1980; King, 2002). Children may fear that the criminal parent will be judged or labelled and that they will be bullied and, since the act of telling someone cannot be reversed, it is with great trepidation that many of these children discuss the topic, if at all. Sack found that the children who took part in his study appeared to be ashamed to the point that it was as if they were 'confessing their *own* wrongdoing by announcing their fathers' confinement' and also noted that children were 'particularly fearful' that the school might find out (1977, p. 172).

Whether it is the parents' or the children's fears that fuel this desire for secrecy, children are often, ultimately, pushed into a forced silence about their situations, which means they must live with the pressure of keeping the truth hidden (see Glover, 2009; Chui, 2010), resorting to evasion and dishonesty when questions are asked regarding the imprisoned parent (see, for example, Stanton, 1980; Sack et al., 1976; King, 2002). It has been claimed that this 'culture of secrecy' (Glover, 2009, p. 8) places an additional burden on a child and 'compound[s] the trauma of separation from the parent' (Standing Committee on Social Issues of the Parliament of New South Wales, 1997, p. 54). As humans, we can often feel a need to express our feelings, especially in times of great upheaval or sadness, and the removal of the option to discuss, and thereby process, the events surrounding a parent's imprisonment can be detrimental to a child's emotional well-being (Johnston, 1995a). Of course, along with technological developments in recent decades came the option of discussing one's feeling in a (seemingly) anonymous, online world. Safe, monitored forums such as Prison Chat UK may be available for children in these situations. As always, however, the danger is that they might choose to share their details, stories and, hence, vulnerability on a less secure forum, but a discussion of the risks involved in such cases belongs to an entirely different type of study.

Beder states that:

As with other aspects of bereavement, the reiteration and retelling of the loss is essential, as it is through the speaking of an event... that survivors can revise it in ways that make it more tolerable (2005, p. 264).

A child's fear that he/she may inadvertently divulge information about a father's whereabouts may lead to the avoidance of social gatherings and, thus, serve to increase the level of social isolation experienced. This can have any number of repercussions. For example, one (adult) son of an incarcerated father claims that the isolation he felt 'deeply affected' his self-esteem (Walsh, 2014). As I put it elsewhere, 'the pressure of keeping the truth hidden, along with the resultant absence of a potentially invaluable support system, means that many children must suffer in silence' (Ryan-Mangan, 2014b, p. 1225).

Moore's research (albeit in the 1980s) concluded that 90% of children of incarcerated parents were not known to be such by their teachers (1988, p. 16) and, of the 11 caregivers with school-going children in King's Irish study, only two claimed that the children's teachers were aware of the parents' imprisonment (2002). Certain authors have suggested that *primary* school teachers are somewhat more likely to know or be informed of a student's father's imprisonment than *secondary* school teachers (eg, Dallaire et al., 2010; Moore, 1988). As with any potentially upsetting or stressful event in a child's life (eg, family bereavement, parental divorce, etc.), it can be helpful for teachers to know that a parent has been incarcerated, so that allowances can be made for "off days" and the like. The majority of teachers in Dallaire's et al.'s study expressed similar views, feeling that it might allow them to be more sensitive and understanding towards a child and perhaps even direct the child to sources of help (2010). Research and reviews such as those by Parke and Clarke-Stewart (2002), Roberts (2012) and McCrickard and Flynn (2015) assert that this kind of openness could result in the provision of appropriate support, which could render the problem, as Morris puts it, 'less acute' (1967, p. 429). Indeed, adolescent children in Boswell and Wedge's study confirmed that teachers were helpful and supportive once they had been told (2002).

However, telling teachers seems to be viewed as either unimportant or undesirable on the part of families with imprisoned parents and children are, thus, often deprived of an extremely accessible and stable support system. As Shaw put it:

people who might be expected to attend to the needs of these children were frequently prevented from doing so by a lack of information or through being unaware of the situation (1987, p. 78).

On the other hand, as discussed earlier, one repercussion of teachers having knowledge of the situation may be to introduce an element of stigma, altering their expectations of these children.

4.9.3 Support

While separation of a parent from his/her family for reasons such as death or illness may attract support and assistance for other family members, 'loss of a family member due to imprisonment, on the other hand, rarely elicits a sympathetic response from significant others' and dependable support systems are often lacking (Fritsch and Burkhead, 1981, p. 84; see also Dallaire & Wilson, 2010). Children may find that there is no acknowledgement of their suffering outside the home (if even there). Some people might believe that the criminal brought the circumstances upon himself *and* his family and wonder why they should have to get involved when they have their own problems. They might even see the knowledge of the family's sense of loss as a part of the offender's punishment.³⁵ Others might doubt the long-term value of their assistance, particularly if the father has been incarcerated previously and has not "learned his lesson". Regardless of the reason, lack of support can mean that, for the entire family, 'normal outlets for grieving are often denied because of the nature of the loss' (Howard, 2000) and, as Beder states, 'when grief...[is] disenfranchised, mourning becomes complicated and prolonged' (2005, p. 260). Having said this, we ought not to assume it is always the case.

³⁵ This view of retributive justice (ie, that 'the criminal has disturbed a pre-existing order of justice, and so ought to be punished in order to right the wrong and to re-establish the order of just relations' [Riordan, 2002, p. 562]) has included the maltreatment or persecution of a criminal's children and descendants as a means by which to "get at" the criminal for many centuries, even millennia. One of the first references to this can be seen in the Bible: 'I, the LORD, thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me' (Exodus, 20; v [KJV]).

In many instances, true friendships will presumably reveal themselves and (financial, emotional or other) support will be offered to a family experiencing this form of loss. For example, Shaw (1987), as well as Sack et al. (1976) found that neighbours were sometimes valuable sources of assistance, with Sack et al. suggesting that the level of support in the community was directly related to the 'family's prior standing in the neighbourhood' (1976, p. 623). In King's Irish study, caregivers gave varied responses in relation to the support afforded to families of offenders (2002). While some said they had not wished the imprisonment to become common knowledge, others stated that their families, friends and communities had shown them a lot of support. Eighty-four percent of caregivers interviewed referred to family and friends as their *only* source of support, with most identifying extended family as the main source of this support (King, 2002). This study did not specify if help was usually given by the prisoner's family or the partner's families but it is interesting to note that five of six wives in Sack's 1977 research complained that, despite living in close proximity, their husbands' families did little to assist them with children and/or finances. The extent to which a family feels supported during a parent's imprisonment can have a profound effect on how a family copes at such a stressful time. There is a risk, however, when prisoners' partners begin to depend on such support, either that previously helpful family members and friends may begin to feel burdened and pull back or, alternatively, that partners may start to feel they are taking advantage and guilt may force them to try to manage on their own, which can add to their stress.

With regard to formal support systems, only three of the 19 caregivers interviewed in King's study stated that they had been in contact with any form of support group (2002). Sack offers two possible reasons for this, the first being that seeking professional help seemed to a prisoner's partner like a 'betrayal of the promise made to her husband that she would manage well while he was gone' (1977, p. 169); the second relates to independence and the view that 'doing things on your own' indicated strength (p. 173).

4.9.4 Bullying

Participants in Boswell and Wedge's study referred to children suffering verbal abuse or other forms of bullying from schoolmates due to their familial circumstances and, in some cases, developing a reluctance to go to school (2002). The issue of bullying surfaces in a large number of studies, including those by Condry (2007), Martyn (2012), Stanton (1980) and Glover (2009), with one piece of research on children of incarcerated parents suggesting that approximately one fifth experienced bullying, while others were afraid to speak of their parents' imprisonment for fear of being bullied (Pugh, 2004). Sometimes bullying can take the form of verbal abuse. For example, children might be teased and told that their parents are 'jailbird[s]' (Sack, 1977, p. 169) or told that they will end up 'just like them' (Allard & Greene, 2011, p. 19).

Alternatively (or additionally), children of offenders may find themselves victims of physical violence (Shaw, 1988), although such cases seem to be considerably less prevalent in the literature. Glover claims that 'some children of prisoners are goaded into being "as tough" as the incarcerated parent' (2009, p. 5) and this could seem like a kind of victimhood, though one ought not to deny that being schooled alongside the child who *was* as tough as a prisoner might be a less than pleasant experience for other pupils. Bullying, unfortunately, is not confined to schools and bullies might not necessarily be other children. Children may experience bullying in any number of locations and sometimes at the hands of adults. Shaw's example of this was Alan whose father was imprisoned for sexual assault on a boy (1988). Alan and his family were viewed by many members of the community as guilty by association and had their house damaged by people who obviously shared this opinion. One day, while walking home from school, Alan was set upon by a group of local adults, 'pushed to the ground and [had] his face rubbed in dog's excrement' (Shaw, 1988, p. 15). Some studies have reported cases of prisoners' partners and other grown-up relatives being treated similarly: receiving death threats and obscene telephone calls, being spat at on the street and having windows smashed or men urinating through the letterbox (Condry, 2007; Soothill & Walby, 1991). Such acts can be terrifying for a child to witness and extremely detrimental to his/her sense of security.

Of course, this is not to dismiss the possibility that children of prisoners can become bullies themselves. Some research has suggested that bullying may provide an outlet for anger and frustration and may be a way in which such children might feel they are regaining control over some part of their lives, having had no say in their parents' confinement (Ormiston Children & Families Trust, 2007; King, 2002).

4.9.5 Changes in peer friendships

In some cases, new care arrangements mean that children are moved to different areas and schools, resulting in loss of, or disruption to, friendships and disruption to education (Cunningham, 2001; Mehana & Reynolds, 2004). However, regardless of whether a child moves to a new school or not, some research has indicated that children with incarcerated parents are likely to have problems with peer relationships. Bocknek et al. found that 'the majority of children [whom they] interviewed described troubled relationships with children at school and few friends if any' (2009, p. 328). Indeed, childcare workers in King's study frequently reported children saying they had no friends in school (2002). There might be a number of reasons for this.

Existing friendships or relationships may break down due to stigma. Breen states: 'friends and schoolmates... [may] snub the children, and long-standing relationships... [may be] severed' (1995, p. 98). In some cases, 'parents pull their children away from children of inmates, with little or no explanation' (Breen, 1995, p. 98). Sometimes, however, there is an explanation; several children in Sack et al.'s research were told by friends/acquaintances that they could not go to their houses because 'your dad's in jail' (1976, p. 623). This can be devastating for a child to hear, as there is nothing he/she can do about the imprisoned parent's situation. In cases where children are not allowed to play with or visit a child because he/she, for example, is rough, plays unfairly or steals, the child can work on improving this behaviour and ask for a second chance. For children of incarcerated parents, no such options exist. Having said this, a child in Amira's research claimed that although 'sometimes... [the other children] get told things by their mums, like "don't play with him"... they usually just do anyway' (1992, p. 90).

When parental incarceration causes changes in a child's behaviour, this, in turn, may create difficulties with other children (see Hampton, 2009). As one parent on the outside put it: 'He has become friendless because of his behaviour. Previously, he was perfectly OK and normal' (Boswell & Wedge, 2002, p. 67). Noting that children of incarcerated parents were more likely to 'engage in prosocial, helping behavior' than their peers, Hampton concluded that increases in aggressive behaviour were more likely (than deficits in prosocial behaviour) to have led to problematic peer relations (2009, p. 21). Children with fathers or mothers in prison may not even *be* treated badly by those around them. They may simply expect this and respond accordingly. Children do not have to experience rejection to suffer its consequences. Fear of rejection alone can be enough to cause suffering. In the words of Foster and Hagan: 'Stigmatization and labeling theories... emphasize that actual and anticipated rejections by others have lasting harmful consequences' (2007, p. 403). Such fears may trigger a number of reactions. However, Breen suggests that 'as the period of incarceration lengthens, the child most likely will withdraw from other children' (1995, p. 98; see also Miller, 2006, p. 477). An attempt to avoid rejection may, thus, result in a child becoming alienated from his/her peers.

The absence of a parent in a child's life can enhance the significance of peer relationships (King, 2002) and, if children have either withdrawn from existing relationships that are more mainstream or been deterred from trying to make new ones, they may seek 'social cliques that are more accepting of them' (Miller, 2006, p. 478; see also Allard & Greene, 2011). Where possible, children may form connections with others who have family members in prison. In fact, some children in Nesmith and Ruhland's study referred to this connection as 'a catalyst for a new friendship', with one teen girl in the study describing it as being much like finding 'another family member' (2008, p. 1123). However, this, in turn, may increase misbehaviour at school and so forth and may contribute to the likelihood of future offending as the child becomes more and more part of a criminal milieu (Breen, 1995; see also Miller, 2006; Hanlon et al., 2005; Lowenstein, 1986). Shaw describes one child whose peer group 'changed markedly from comparatively law-abiding children with caring parents to the more troublesome element in the school whose parents cared little about what their children did or else were not at liberty to do

anything about it' (1987, p. 54). And if all of the children with 'caring parents' are prevented from initiating/continuing a friendship with a child who has a father in prison, one easily might imagine a scenario wherein the offender's child is forced to seek peer interaction/friendship with children of uncaring (or, for whatever reason, unknowing) parents.

The quality of peer relationships can influence a child's academic performance. Wentzel noted that 'children who enjoy positive relationships with peers...tend to be engaged in and even excel at academic tasks more than those who have peer relationship problems' (2005, p. 279), while Shaw found that people in education generally accepted 'that unhappiness is a barrier to learning which cannot be ignored' (1987, p. 52). Roughly speaking, few might now subscribe to the view that academic success (whatever exactly that consists in) has to be won through relentless misery. A happy child, generally speaking, may be a more productive child and it is rarely possible to "park" one's emotions and concentrate solely on study. Though, then again, study or application to any task can be a welcome distraction from domestic and other concerns.

4.10 Conclusion

Through examining the indirect effects and social implications of parental (and where possible paternal) incarceration that might (either positively or negatively) influence the impact of the experience on children, I have drawn attention to the multiple ways in which children's lives and particularly their academic lives can be disturbed by such an event. Sections 4.2 – 4.7 outline a number of additional forms of upheaval or familial stress that might compromise a child's ability to concentrate on (or a caregiver's ability to support) his/her academic endeavours. Given the reported high incidence of such experiences among children with incarcerated parents, in addition to the well-documented problem of 'disentangling the risks' surrounding parental incarceration (Phillips et al., 2006, p. 677), it is important to consider these additional risk factors, particularly in the Irish context where very few studies have previously done so. These sections of the literature review have not only informed the development of the first research question – What are the experiences of pre- and primary school children in Ireland who have a father in

prison? – but also contributed to how the term ‘experiences’ is defined in the study (ie, as the witnessing of events related to a father’s incarceration, as well as the physical or legal displacement of children and/or key people in their lives, which coincided with or was a direct result of the father’s incarceration).

Section 4.8 discusses the explanations given to children for a parent’s absence. It is linked somewhat to the section by which it is followed, in that, parents tend to make decisions about whether or not to be honest with their children (with regard to fathers’ whereabouts) based on what they perceive to be the social repercussions of doing so. These explanations, whether accurate or not, have a far-reaching impact on children’s interpretations of their circumstances and are, thus, vital in determining their social and personal reactions to parental incarceration at school (and more generally). And so, this portion of the review highlighted the influence of children’s interpretations of their experiences – a fundamental aspect of the second research question and also a necessary component of the third and fourth research questions.

Section 4.9 provides a review of the literature concerning the social implications of parental incarceration for children. This was particularly pertinent insofar as the development of the final research question was concerned. Existing research suggests that parental incarceration can have a wide-range of social repercussions for children in the school setting (eg, social exclusion, lowered expectations on the part of teachers, increased support from school staff). This accentuated the necessity of exploring how paternal incarceration could influence children’s school-related interactions in the Republic of Ireland.

Chapter Five proceeds now to explore children’s emotional and behavioural reactions to circumstances of this kind and explores the repercussions of having a father imprisoned for children where academic performance and health are concerned.

Chapter Five

Reactions of/Repercussions for children

5.1 Introduction

Wright and Seymour have asserted that children may express themselves through 'physical, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural means that we call symptoms' (2002, p. 12). We can reasonably suspect that many children may not have the vocabulary necessary to speak about the distress, anxiety and extreme range of emotions that they experience during and after a parent's imprisonment so it is obvious that these negative feelings must emerge and manifest themselves in some way, shape or form. What follows is a description of some of these possible symptoms.

5.2 Academic performance and educational outcomes

There are many studies that examine the academic achievements of children who either live in father-absent homes, have little contact with or help from their fathers or come from one-parent/divorced families. Most of these suggest that such children are less likely to experience the same levels of academic success as children in father-present homes, two-parent families or those with high father availability (see, for example, Blanchard & Biller, 1971; Shinn, 1978; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997). Others, however, have found no significant differences relating to academic preparedness/achievement (see Fowler & Richards, 1978; Hammond, 1979). Others again, such as Wallerstein & Kelly (1980), assert that 'life stresses such as parental separation may impose temporary interruption in the learning process...[which] might lead to significant academic problems' and point out that emotional distress may have a negative impact on learning ability (cited in Bisnaire et al., 1990, pp. 67-68). In addition, researchers such as Sameroff, Seifer, Baldwin and Baldwin (1993) and Burchinal, Roberts, Hooper and Zeisel (2000) have claimed that environmental considerations can have an impact on children's development and intellectual performance and, judging from the research, this has some intuitive plausibility.

Similarly, there has been considerable controversy over the effects that parental incarceration can have on a child's academic performance. On the one hand, some research claims that children with incarcerated parents are at increased risk of academic failure (eg, Trice & Brewster, 2004; Stanton, 1980), school or academic problems (Dallaire et al., 2010; Phillips et al., 2002; Wilbur et al., 2007; Nichols, Loper & Meyer, 2016), retention in a particular class level (Turney & Haskins, 2014)³⁶ or a more general decline/deterioration in academic performance (eg, Shaw, 1987; Lowenstein, 1986). Habecker's study, which used data collected by the University of North Carolina for the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, claims that children who have experienced parental incarceration are 50% less likely to complete high school (see also Cho, 2011; Nichols & Loper, 2012)³⁷ and that overall educational attainment (ie, the level of education completed) is lower among this population (2013; see also Nichols et al., 2016; Hagan & Foster, 2012).

Dallaire et al.'s findings, to the effect that 'these children [while still attending school,] show greater academic-related problem behaviors than other students' (2010, p. 288), are consistent with findings from Stanton. The latter's study of children of incarcerated *mothers*, compared to children of mothers on probation, found that 70% of children in the former group showed low or below average school performance (ie, were rated in the bottom third of the class) as against 17% of the maternal probation group (1980). Only 4% of children with incarcerated mothers (versus 33% of children with mothers on probation) showed high or above average performance and 50% exhibited classroom behavioural problems following their mothers' confinement. Murray and Farrington claim Stanton's research shows a causal connection between parental imprisonment and children's school problems (2008b). Friedman and Esselstyn's research also suggested that the academic

³⁶ Turney and Haskins' research found that the increased likelihood of children with incarcerated fathers being retained at a particular class level appeared to be driven by the perceptions teachers had about children's academic proficiency, which is hardly surprising, given the fact that teachers are generally responsible for making recommendations that children be retained in the first place. However, the fact that this increased likelihood of retention was not explained by behavioural problems or test scores is interesting and emphasises the importance of teachers and teachers' perceptions in influencing the academic trajectories of children with incarcerated fathers (2014).

³⁷ Nichols and Loper's study relates to adolescents with incarcerated *household members* more generally. They found that such children tended to score lower in a commonly used measure of cognitive ability (2012).

aptitudes of children of incarcerated parents were more likely to be rated by teachers as below average (1965). However, child participants in the study were predominantly male (74.3%) and it has received some criticism for its overrepresentation of certain cultural groups and failure to make socio-economic comparisons between the groups (eg, Stanton, 1980). In a study that examined the issue among children of a similar socio-economic status, Neal compared the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Programme (TCAP) scores (mathematics, reading/language arts, social science and science) of children with incarcerated parents to those of children who lived in single-parent households for other reasons, uncovering a slight tendency for the former to have lower test scores (2009). Unfortunately however, 42% of the comparison group were subsequently revealed to have experienced parental incarceration previously and resultant adjustments left just 29.3% of the entire sample (and a relatively small number of children) in this group. In addition, due to the fact that participants were recruited from two mentoring groups, through which children can plausibly be deemed to have had more social (and perhaps, at least in some cases, academic) support than those who had not participated in such programmes, results cannot be taken to be representative of all children with incarcerated parents.

Prisoners' spouses in the work of Sack et al. (1976) also reported that more than half their children had problems in school after the parents' incarcerations (although prisoners themselves reported half as many problems suggesting that they were either unaware of the issues or, for whatever reason, chose to play them down). The problems usually consisted of a 'drop in grades or instances of aggressiveness', but these generally tended to be temporary issues (p. 624). Among the six- to eight-year-olds in the study, four of the 25 children seemed to display signs of 'transient school phobia' and were unwilling to go to school for a four- to six-week period following their parents' incarcerations (1976, p. 624; see also Sack, 1977). Consistent with Sameroff et al. and Burchinal et al.'s research (in 1993 and 2000, respectively), there is also evidence to suggest that children who experienced more risk factors (ie, being witness to parental criminal activity, arrest and sentencing) were more likely to experience problems with receptive vocabulary than children who did not witness such events and Dallaire and Wilson warn that

this ‘may make success at school difficult’ for the former (2010, p. 413). While temporary disruptions to academic performance may be viewed by some as trivial, Murray and Farrington used the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development (CSDD)³⁸ to evaluate more long-term effects, finding that imprisonment of a parent made it possible to predict poor educational outcomes at 14 and 18 for boys who experienced a parent’s imprisonment between birth and 10 (2008b). And Poehlmann found that, more generally, children’s intellectual outcomes³⁹ were jeopardised by the multiple risks associated with maternal imprisonment, notably caregiver risks (2005a).⁴⁰ In other words, the negative academic effects of parental imprisonment potentially can significantly influence and compromise a child’s entire life chances.

On the other hand, ‘rigorous studies’ carried out by Murray et al. in 2012 seemed to show that parental incarceration is *not* associated with increased risk of poor educational performance (p. 175) and Cho claims to have identified a *decreased* likelihood of children with recently imprisoned mothers being retained at a particular class level (2009b). As a whole, some might concur with Friedman and Esselstyn’s declaration that ‘the causal connection...[between paternal incarceration and children’s diminished school-related outcomes can] not be articulated precisely’ or definitively (1965, p. 59). We cannot, however, ignore the role that other things play in shaping a child’s academic success or experiences. For example, for one boy in Sack’s study, the initial decline in school performance was reversed once his mother was honest with him about his father’s imprisonment (1977) and Stanton’s research suggested that ‘the long-term factors of socioeconomic status and mother’s criminal record were more influential in causing the observed difference between the children’s academic performance than whether or not the mother was currently in jail’ (1980, p. 93).

³⁸ The CSDD is a longitudinal research project which uses data from 411 males (and their parents) in England. At the outset of the study, in 1961/1962, these males were aged eight to nine years and living in a working-class area in inner-city London (Murray & Farrington, 2008a). The study has followed their lives (criminally-speaking and otherwise) in an attempt to investigate the development of antisocial and offending behaviour (Murray & Farrington, 2005).

³⁹ Poehlmann utilised the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale to measure children’s verbal and non-verbal cognitive skills (2005a).

⁴⁰ The quality of the family environment during a mother’s imprisonment was found to mediate the relationship between caregiver risks and a child’s intellectual outcomes (2005a).

Interestingly, Shlafer, Reedy and Davies, who found children of currently or previously incarcerated parents to be less likely to receive good grades and more likely to face disciplinary action than their counterparts, identified marked differences between various school settings (ie, public schools, alternative learning centres and juvenile correctional facilities; 2017). Their findings revealed that children in public/non-fee-paying school settings fared less well on a range of school-related outcomes including those mentioned above. Having said this, Shlafer et al. relied solely on self-reports by students and their measure of discipline involved asking students about being sent to the office and suspended (2017), punishments that may be used differently in different schools. In other words, it might seem intuitively plausible that behavioural expectations would be lower in certain schools, in that opinions as to what exactly an infraction is might vary among individual schools. For example, using bad language might be (so to speak) a reprimandable offence in one school but seen as commonplace in another.

Somewhat linked to Shlafer et al.'s findings are those of Haskins (2017). Using data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, Haskins concluded that children of incarcerated parents were more likely than their peers to attend disadvantaged schools or schools with poorer climates, though there was little evidence to suggest that this resulted in poorer cognitive outcomes for the former group (2017). Finally, Nichols et al. revealed evidence to suggest that family connectedness (ie, having close bonds and positive attachment to family members and/or caregivers) and school connectedness⁴¹ might compensate somewhat for the effect of parental incarceration on adolescent's academic achievement and truancy (2016). Regardless of whether or not there is a causal link between parental incarceration and academic performance, we can reasonably assume that Johnston's suggestion was accurate: 'attention/concentration difficulties lead to academic...problems at school' (1995b, p. 76). After all, if children have trouble concentrating, they are unlikely to grasp the concepts and skills being taught in the classroom.

⁴¹ Reflecting on the work of Maddox and Prinz (2003), Nichols et al. define school connectedness as 'an attachment and commitment to the school and the teachers' (2016, p. 1094).

Only 5% of participants in Boswell and Wedge's study of partners of incarcerated men considered that their children were falling behind academically; although it was suggested that many children 'are affected within the school setting, to a degree which... [may be] underestimated by their parents' (2002, p. 79). Fifty-three percent of the children in Nesmith and Ruhland's study claimed that they were doing 'well' or 'really well' in school with most of the remainder describing their progress as 'okay' (2008, p. 1127). Stanton received equally non-committal and vague answers in her study of incarcerated mothers (1980). However, these self-reported measures may not be very reliable as children may either overestimate (perhaps through bravado or to avoid shame) or underestimate their success (the latter possibly being due to a desire not to be viewed as anything resembling a "nerd" or perhaps as a consequence of simply having no idea what levels of achievement can or should be expected for their age). In 2010 Dallaire et al. obtained the views of teachers, who may be assumed to be more objective, and found that *they* tended to rate these children as 'more likely to show problematic academic behaviors, such as being tardy or absent, and less likely to show positive academic behaviors, such as participate in after school activities or make honor roll' (p. 288).⁴² Similarly, American research by Wildeman et al. in 2017 uncovered evidence to suggest that third- to fifth-grade teachers' expectations with regard to children's academic behaviour were lower when the (hypothetical) children in question were known to have fathers in prison. Having read a vignette about an imaginary student, teachers were asked to rate how they might expect the student to behave in the future. Results suggested that students with fathers in prison were expected to display 10% to 40% more school-based behavioural problems than those whose fathers simply were not 'in the picture' (Wildeman et al., 2017, p. 11).

Murray and Farrington found that, compared to boys whose fathers had no history of incarceration, boys (aged eight to 11) whose fathers *had* such a history were more likely to display low IQ scores and low junior attainment results, measured by arithmetic, English and verbal reasoning tests (2005). Geller et al. found some

⁴² Honor roll is a practice found in schools, most often in the United States of America, in which lists of students are published throughout, or at the end of, an academic year to recognise those students' academic achievements. To "make honor roll" means that one has, essentially, received an award of distinction from a school.

evidence of increased attention problems among children with incarcerated fathers and also observed that these children scored significantly lower than their peers on a measure of verbal ability (2012). The former result was consistent with reports by participants in Moore's study (1992). Much research related to the educational impact of parental incarceration refers to the work of Trice and Brewster in 2004. Their study was, however, based on *adolescents* who had experienced *maternal* incarceration and, thus, is not entirely relevant. Despite this, it is interesting to note that they found adolescent children of incarcerated mothers to be nearly four times more likely to fail academically, be out of school or be suspended than a sample of their best friends and three times more likely to miss a significant amount of time through absence (Trice & Brewster, 2004). Alternatively, Cho, also studying children of incarcerated *mothers*, concluded that maternal imprisonment was not associated with change in elementary school-aged children's reading and mathematics standardised test scores (2009a). Although it is worth noting that the comparison group studied by Cho comprised children whose mothers were incarcerated for short periods in jail.

Of course, effects may vary from child to child. Shaw declared that 'while some are so distraught that they cease learning and in some cases refuse to attend school, others flourish when father is off the scene' (1987, p. 56; see also Morris, 1967), adding that 'teachers reported an improvement in some children when their fathers were sent to prison' (1987, p. 35). Other teachers 'spoke of improved attendance and punctuality. In other cases no change was detected [and] sometimes marked differences were apparent within the same family' (1987, p. 56), suggesting that many children are 'able to adapt and function favourably despite their disadvantages' (Edwards, 2009, p. 260). For example, when Johnny's father (although not a convicted criminal) started drinking, gambling and taking heroin after his wife walked out on the family, Johnny and his brother reacted very differently to what quickly became their turbulent childhoods. While Johnny's brother went on to take, as Johnny puts it, 'the high road – college, athletics, family', Johnny, who had been an excellent student, claims that his home life 'changed his compass' and finally resulted in his spending over 20 years in prison (Iacoviello, 2015).

There may be any number of reasons why some children are able to adapt while others are not. Each case is likely to be unique but Robertson suggests that varying reactions to parental imprisonment can generally be explained by different ages or positions in the family, as well as varying attitudes and personalities on the part of children, relationships with the offender and levels of understanding in relation to crime or imprisonment (2007).

In the 1980s, Rutter suggested that academic success may act as a buffer to adversity or stressful life events and Wallerstein and Kelly found that some children seemed to use the school experience/setting as a support system (1981 and 1980, respectively). We cannot deny that school could provide children with a chance to forget about their parents' imprisonment (at least for a few hours each day, albeit more likely if people do not know about the incarceration or are sympathetic to the child) and that it may be the only setting in which they receive regular affirmation. This could facilitate their successful adaptation to the situation and, thus, reduce the likelihood of negative academic outcomes.

It seems reasonable to believe that the impact of parental incarceration on children's academic performance can be affected by a number of moderating factors such as the level of contact prior to incarceration (see, for example, Boswell & Wedge, 2002), social class (something that 'has always been strongly associated with school performance' [Schostak, 1991a, p. 163]) and, possibly, the parents' own school experiences (Vacca, 2008). In a study of children who had experienced the separation of their parents, Bisnaire et al. found that 30% showed 'a marked decrease in their academic performance' following separation and that those with continuing access to both parents (ie, spending decent lengths of time with each) seemed to demonstrate 'better academic adjustment' (1990, p. 75). The researchers suggested that more contact with both parents would give children access to the 'scholastic aptitudes and attitudes of both parents' which may have an impact on their learning (1990, p. 74). This may also apply to children experiencing parental incarceration and highlights the moderating effect contact *during* incarceration can have, though it presupposes that either or both parents could be said to have or exhibit 'scholastic aptitudes and attitudes' of the "right" sort.

Peniston asserts that the length of time a parent/caregiver spends under the supervision of correctional authorities (ie, in jail/prison or on probation) is an important factor, which can influence the likelihood of children having behaviour-, attendance- or peer-related problems in school (2006). Peniston's research found that children whose caregivers had been in jail/prison or on probation in the previous 12 months were less likely than their peers to have such problems. However, when the timeframe was extended to two years the former were more likely than their peers to report such issues (2006). Having said this, in relation to the length of parents' prison sentences, Cho found that children with imprisoned mothers serving long-term sentences were no more likely than children with incarcerated mothers serving shorter terms to score lower on standardised reading and mathematics tests (2009a) and actually, initially at least, less likely to repeat a grade level (2009b). Although Dallaire and Wilson (2010) point out that these findings await replication.

As regards gender, it is interesting to note that Friedman and Esselstyn's study of children with incarcerated *fathers* found girls to be 'influenced more adversely than boys', although the numbers involved were small and both genders were more often rated by teachers as below average on psychological and social characteristics (1965, p. 59).

By contrast, in Dallaire et al.'s study of children of incarcerated *mothers*, which was hypothetical in nature, teachers rated the females as more competent than the males (2010). In this portion of Dallaire et al.'s study the participants (all teachers) were randomly assigned one of eight hypothetical vignettes/scenarios describing why a hypothetical child was entering the participant's classroom as a new student (2010). The participants were told that the hypothetical child was living with a grandparent because his/her parent was absent for one of a variety of reasons including being away at school, away at rehab, away at prison, or simply away. Participants were then asked to rate how likely they thought it would be that the child would display certain behaviours based on four considerations – behavioural competencies, support at home from his/her caregiver, academic competence and social competence. Although some might claim this study (like that of Wildeman et al. in

2017 – see page 93 and below) tells us more about how some teachers *think* than how pupils behave, the teachers involved were drawing on considerable professional experience (on average, almost 13 years each); thus, their predictions should not be taken lightly and may be assumed to have some significance.

Both of these studies (ie, that of Friedman and Esselstyn and that of Dallaire et al.) contradict Warshak and Santrok's findings that children who did best academically were in the custody of a same-gender parent following parental divorce more often than were those who performed less well (1983, cited in Bisnaire et al., 1990, p. 73). However, there *has* been evidence to lend support to such findings. For example, in 2013 Habecker's research revealed that daughters of incarcerated fathers were (2.26 times) more likely to complete high school and to have higher overall levels of academic attainment than sons of incarcerated fathers. One year later Haskins reported that boys (particularly boys from minority ethnic communities) with fathers in prison tended to have lower levels of non-cognitive skills (ie, higher levels of behavioural/emotional problems) than girls with fathers in prison when entering the school system (2014; see also Geller et al.'s findings in relation to concentration problems, 2012). Haskins also found a significantly increased likelihood of boys who had experienced the incarceration of a father by the age of five requiring special education placements by age nine (2014). And, in another hypothetical study, which attempted to investigate if/how knowledge of a father's incarceration might influence third- to fifth-grade teachers' expectations of children's behavioural problems and competencies, Wildeman et al. concluded that teachers expectations were lower for boys than girls. More generally, caregivers in Dallaire and Wilson's research on *parental* imprisonment reported that boys experienced more attention problems than girls (2010).

Though success in school is experienced by some children, most children of incarcerated parents seem to experience problems, either in relation to academic performance or behaviour (eg, Bocknek et al., 2009). This led Friedman and Esselstyn to conclude: 'there is more than suggestive evidence ... that committing a father to jail is soon accompanied by a depression in the school performance of his children – not alone [sic] academically, but in all other particulars as well' (1965, p.

59). Further, the academic effects of parental imprisonment may be exacerbated by teachers being unaware of children's situations and failure to inform teachers or other school staff may result in children's needs being 'mismanaged or mishandled by school personnel' (Neal, 2009, p. 33).

5.3 Changes in behaviour

Various studies have found parental absence through imprisonment to be associated with a range of behavioural problems on the part of children (eg, Fritsch & Burkhead, 1981; Wildeman, 2010; Lowenstein, 1986), with many parents and other adults noting significant deterioration in children's behaviour and/or increases in levels of aggression following a parent's incarceration (eg, Arditti et al., 2003; Geller et al., 2012; King, 2002; Sack et al., 1976). Interestingly however, even though prisoners' wives considered their children to have become more aggressive/disruptive and less obedient, prisoners did not share the same opinion, believing these changes to be 'milder or non-existent' (Sack et al., 1976, p. 624), perhaps suggesting a reduced awareness of home circumstances since being sent to prison, though another reading might be that the mothers exaggerated certain problems, perhaps projecting onto children their own stresses.

But taken overall, paternal incarceration may, according to some researchers, have a 'stronger effect' on children's aggressive behaviours than other forms of father absence (Geller et al., 2012, p. 71; for similar findings regarding *parental* absence, see Murray and Farrington, 2005), although Moerk did not report such findings in his retrospective study (1973). The variance in these results may be explained by Appleyard, Egeland, van Dulmen and Sroufe's linear risk model in which being exposed to a greater number of risks is likely to lead to worse behavioural outcomes (2005). In other words, the absence of a parent may be associated with some behavioural problems, the absence of a parent through incarceration more so. The absence of a parent through incarceration along with witnessing additional risk factors is especially likely to have such an effect. This surely has some intuitive plausibility as we are well aware of the risks to camels' backs from excess of straw.

Although some research has indicated that children of incarcerated parents are at an increased risk of developing behavioural problems (eg, Wilbur et al., 2007; Hampton, 2009; Murray et al., 2012), it remains to be seen whether incarceration is 'simply correlated with developmental and behavioral problems or if it is a direct cause' (Sanders & Dunifon, 2011, p. 4). There has been considerable controversy with regard to the possible causal effects of parental imprisonment on children's behavioural problems (and later criminality, which I explore further later in this section). Although researchers such as Murray and Farrington (2005, 2008a) and Huebner and Gustafson (2007) claim to have found an independent effect of parental imprisonment on child antisocial/problem behaviour or criminal outcomes later in life, others have not confirmed this (see, for example, Bor, McGee & Fagan, 2004; Murray et al., 2007). And while Geller et al. claim that Wildeman's 2010 study 'provides greater evidence of causality [and]... offers support for the argument that paternal incarceration increases children's physical aggression' (2012, p. 52), Murray et al. insist that 'firm causal conclusions cannot be drawn' (2012, p. 191).

It is possible, however, that other considerations (though these themselves may be related to the parental imprisonment) are to blame for the harm inflicted on children, such as parent-child separation, financial strain, reduced quality parenting (perhaps linked to caregiver stress/depression), an anti-authority mentality and stigma (Lewis, Bates & Murray, 2008; Murray & Farrington, 2008b; Chui, 2016a). In other words, it may be very difficult, or even impossible, to sort out causes and consequences or primary and secondary effects. Pupils with parents in prison might be seen as existing in a kind of storm – thunder sounds, lightning flashes, rain falls, wind blows. A person in a storm is affected by the storm, not by the rain one minute and the thunder the next. At some level, the various facts are related to each other – low pressure makes for rain, or whatever may be the case. But the *experience* is of a storm.

The range of behavioural responses to parental incarceration encountered in the literature can be divided into acting-out and acting-in (also referred to as externalising and internalising behaviour, respectively). Fritsch and Burkhead assert that acting-out manifests itself in 'hostile behaviour, use of drugs or alcohol,

running away, school truancy, discipline problems, aggressive acts, and involvement in delinquent activities', whereas acting-in includes 'daydreaming, unwillingness to engage in play, withdrawal, acting babyish, fear of school, a drop in schoolwork, crying a lot, and nightmares' (1981, pp. 85-86).

The reasons why children act out are varied and numerous. For example, in a case study analysis regarding a three-year-old boy Reckman et al. claimed that the aggressive behaviour Danny exhibited while visiting his mother in a treatment facility was an example of behaviour often observed in children who see the world as being out of their control or unpredictable (2012). However, it ought never to be forgotten that, in some ways, such children can worsen their own situations by simply imitating or copying their parents' antisocial behaviours as suggested by Social Learning Theories (eg, Matsueda 1988). Cooley put this in a logical, if simplistic, way when he explained that the

well-nurtured boy emulates his own father and George Washington; but the child of the criminal, for precisely similar reasons, emulates his father...or some other illustrious rascal. The very faculties that serve to elevate and ennoble a child who lives among good associations may make a criminal of one who lives among bad ones. We rise or fall with equal facility through our associative instincts (1896, p. 401).

Indeed, half the children in Sack's research exhibited some form of behavioural disturbance soon after their fathers were imprisoned and Sack felt that this was, to some degree, a 'defensive maneuver designed to continue their relationships with [their] "lost" fathers, now identified as bad' (1977 p. 165). The words one boy uttered with regard to his new penchant for stealing certainly would seem to support this opinion: 'I'm just like my father was' (Trunnell, 1968, cited in Sack, 1977, p. 170).

Sometimes children act up and speak of committing or do commit crimes with the idea that they will then be imprisoned with their fathers (Shaw, 1987; King, 2002). Alternatively, Murray et al. suggest that 'if children grow up seeing their parents respond to stressful life events with antisocial behavior, they may be socialized into having antisocial reactions to disruptive events, such as parental incarceration' (2012, p. 190). Acting out might also be considered a means by which children can

attract attention and achieve status among (or affirmation from) peers. With self-esteem perhaps negatively correlated with destructive behaviour (as suggested, for example, by Coopersmith in 1967), it may be that children feel they can “succeed” at destruction and they may, as a result, receive affirmation from deviant peer groups, as previously discussed.

Others hypothesise that boys being genetically predisposed to aggression or otherwise antisocial behaviour may be (at least partially) responsible for the association between paternal incarceration and physical aggression (Guo, Roettger & Cai, 2008; Jaffee et al., 2003; Crowe, 1974) although this is a controversial hypothesis that does not sit well with many including Rutter who concluded that delinquent behaviour is ‘not inherited and that the personality disorders of parents in association with family discord are the major contributing factors’ (1971, cited in Sack, 1977, p. 169). But, in the end, we might agree that ‘it makes little difference... whether parental absence initiates or merely aggravates pre-existing behavior problems’ (Fritsch & Burkhead, 1981, pp. 86-87). The problem is the behaviour, not its cause(s).

Breen asserts that, whether a child’s response to parental incarceration manifests itself in acting-out or acting-in behaviour, he/she is ‘at risk of eventually becoming involved in the criminal justice system’ (1995, p. 99). On this point, numerous pieces of research have suggested that adult children of incarcerated parents are more likely to lapse into delinquency/criminal behaviour or incarceration than their peers (see, for example, McCord, McCord & Zola 1959; Robins, West & Herjanic 1975; Farrington, Barnes & Lambert, 1996; Acoca, Le, Poe-Yamagata & Muckelroy, 2000; Dannerbeck, 2005, etc.) with Farrington, Jolliffe, Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber and Kalb suggesting six possible reasons for the intergenerational transmission of criminality (2001), including (and perhaps most controversially) genetic mechanisms. It may be, as Crowe’s findings of 1974 would seem to suggest, that there is an element of genetic risk when it comes to antisocial behaviour/criminality but perhaps only in conjunction with environmental risks. Some studies have stated that children of offenders are five to six times more likely to be imprisoned themselves (eg, Johnston, 1995b; Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999). However, in 2008

Murray and Farrington were unable to locate evidence to support this claim and proceeded to carry out a thorough review of a number of studies⁴³, eventually concluding that children of imprisoned parents were more than three times as likely to engage in antisocial behaviour as their peers (2008b). It is not clear, however, if this added risk can be attributed to parental incarceration or parental criminality/antisocial behaviour (see Lipsey & Derzon, 1998; Murray & Farrington, 2008b). It has also been suggested that there may be a possible official bias against children of offenders in that police are more inclined to arrest them and courts are more likely to convict them (see Cunningham & Baker, 2003; Huebner & Gustafson, 2007) but Murray and Farrington found that this did not account for the high rate of offending observed in the Cambridge Study (2008b). It may be that people, especially the police, have a tendency to find what they look for and more scrutiny (literally – in the form of extra patrols and so forth – and metaphorically – in the sense of a child’s “card being marked” at an early age) may be applied to the offspring of known criminals than the offspring of law-abiding citizens (or criminals who have been clever enough to remain unknown).

It also must be noted that some studies have identified differences in the levels of delinquency/offspring offending associated with paternal absence/parental imprisonment according to the country in which the children are residing (see Junger-Tas, Marshall & Ribeaud, 2003; Murray et al., 2007). This may be indicative of varying levels of support or provision for children of incarcerated parents in different countries. For example, Murray et al., having concluded that the effects of parental incarceration in Sweden (unlike England) disappeared after controlling for parental criminality, suggested that this may have been

the result of shorter prison sentences in Sweden, more family friendly prison policies, a welfare-oriented juvenile justice system, an extended social welfare system, and more sympathetic public attitudes toward crime and punishment (2007, p. 133).⁴⁴

⁴³ These studies looked at whether or not children experienced behavioural problems or what is sometimes called conduct disorder, were arrested or referred to juvenile authorities, went on to be convicted as adults or became what some might call anti-social delinquents. For a full review, see Murray and Farrington (2008b).

⁴⁴ For this study Murray et al. used data from Project Metropolitan (Sweden) and the CSDD (England). The children in question were all born in 1953 (2007).

Geller et al.'s research 'suggests a robust effect of paternal incarceration on child aggression' but no relationship between incarceration and children's tendency towards internalising of problems (2012, pp. 65). The latter is contrary to the findings of Wakefield and Wildeman (2011). However, as Geller et al. (2012) point out, Wakefield and Wildeman included adolescents and young adults in their study as well as children and whether a person reacts in one way or another to an event such as imprisonment of a father may be greatly influenced by age or developmental stage. For example, the moody teenager stereotype is not entirely devoid of truth and an adolescent with a father in prison might be more likely to act in or become introverted than a five-year-old as the "natural" tendency to moodiness is increased by circumstances. Though, of course, one could construct a story that made the very opposite point, with "teenage rebellion" (acting out) becoming all the more likely. Still, age may matter and, although Sack (1977) and McCord et al. (1963 cited in Sack, 1977, p. 171) indicated that boys aged six to 12 were most likely to display aggressive or deviant behaviour, we have very little evidence to suggest any more than that.

In the United Kingdom, 22% of prisoners' partners/caregivers in Boswell and Wedge's study reported deteriorations in children's behaviour following paternal imprisonment (2002). Comparing these results to those of Noble in another UK study, we find that they vary considerably, this time with 80% reported to have developed behavioural problems (Noble, 1995, cited in Boswell & Wedge, 2002).⁴⁵ We must thus ask how these figures can be so different. It might be reasonable to suspect that parents are not reliable sources of information on children's delinquent behaviours. Some behaviour problems may be under-reported as parents/caregivers may be reluctant to admit that they are having disciplinary problems with children in case it was seen as a lack of proficiency on their part in the role of carer, as Sack found to be the case (1977). Alternatively, new behavioural problems exhibited by children may not be seen by mothers as being connected to fathers' imprisonment, as was the case in Morris's study (1967). Indeed, Sack found that mothers in his study were initially unaware of this connection and surmised

⁴⁵ In Tudball's Australian study, 62% of participants stated there had been negative changes in children's behaviour (2000).

that ‘perhaps their own preoccupations at the time did not allow for this kind of reflection’ (1977, p. 170). It could be that parents/caregivers on the outside are so busy that they do not have sufficient time to sit back and view the situation in its entirety. In addition, Shaw claims that a parent ‘is emotionally involved where his or her own child is concerned and therefore may not be able to stand back to consider the child’s behaviour objectively’ and suggests that those who are not emotionally involved with the child, such as teachers, are more inclined to be in a position to do so (1987, p. 49). In other words, it may take an outsider to understand. Thus, a better guide may be a 2010 study by Dallaire et al. They consulted a number of teachers and reported that these teachers noticed ‘several distinct child behavioral and emotional reactions’ in the classroom which they believed to be related to parental incarceration, including emotional disturbances and internalising/externalising behaviours (2010, p. 284).

However, as with many aspects of parental incarceration, there are a number of factors which may moderate the impact for children. These include the level of contact a child has with a parent prior to and during imprisonment and the gender of both the parent and child. It may seem reasonable to assume that the behavioural reactions of children who were not living with their fathers prior to incarceration would be less severe than that of a child whose father was suddenly removed from the family home and imprisoned. However, while Geller et al.’s results suggest that ‘incarceration elevates behavior problems substantially *more* for children who had been living with their fathers prior to imprisonment [emphasis added]’, they also found that it significantly increased aggression problems among children whose fathers were not residing with them, ‘suggesting that effects operate at least partially through channels unrelated to father-child contact’ (2012, p. 72). In other words, it appears there are more factors at play than the separation of a father from his child(ren).

For a variety of reasons (eg, parents wishing to protect their children, inappropriate visiting hours, finances, etc.), many children of incarcerated fathers do not see them very often during their imprisonment. Sometimes it can be that children are simply too intimidated by the search procedures at the prison. For example, in the RTÉ

documentary *Prison Families*, one prisoner's partner claimed that her daughter did not like to go too often because she felt uncomfortable 'takin' off... [her] shoes, [and intimidated by] the metal detector, the dogs an' stuff' (McArdle, Ford & Leigh, 2014b). While it is understandable that children might be upset by such alien procedures and, perhaps, display behavioural reactions in the short term, there seems to be evidence that failure to maintain the father-child bond can also have longer lasting implications for behaviour. According to Whitaker, Orzol and Kahn's findings:

lower levels of father involvement (seeing the child <1 time per week) [may be] associated with an increased risk of behavior problems in the anxious/depressed and inattention/hyperactivity domains (2006, p. 554).

This suggests that these children are at even higher risk of developing behavioural problems if distance, finances or other such factors limit their visits to their fathers.

Fritsch and Burkhead (1981) assert that imprisonment of a father usually results in children, regardless of gender, displaying externalising behaviour (acting-out; see also Sack et al., 1976), while imprisonment of a mother leads to children displaying internalising behaviour (acting-in). This was, at least in part, contradicted by Wildeman and Turney's findings which suggest that 'the average effects of maternal incarceration on children's behavioural problems are null' (2014, p. 1042). And in 2016, in his study of caregivers of children whose *fathers* were imprisoned, Chui found that 39% and 26% of children displayed higher-than-normal internalising and externalising problems, respectively (2016a), which appeared to repudiate Fritsch and Burkhead's assertion.

Some studies have claimed that, when faced with challenging circumstances, boys are more likely to externalise behavioural problems, whereas, girls are more likely to internalise them (see, for example, Malone et al., 2004; Fergusson, Horwood & Lynskey, 1995). In the case specifically of children whose parents are imprisoned, Gabel and Shindledecker (1993) also found worse antisocial reactions for boys. The results of Wildeman's study suggested that paternal incarceration is associated with increased physical aggression for boys (except in the case of violent offenders/abusive fathers) and that paternal incarceration may actually 'decrease

girls' physical aggression, although this finding is not robust' (2010, p. 285). However, Geller et al. challenged Wildeman's findings in relation to girls in results that estimated the effects of incarceration on aggression to be almost twice as great for boys as girls, although the effects were significant for *both* genders (2012). The latter part of these findings is similar to those of Murray et al., who found parental incarceration in childhood to be a good way to predict adult criminality amongst males *and* females, but, interestingly, they asserted that there was a slightly greater effect for females (2007). And Moffitt, Caspi, Rutter and Silva (2001) considered boys and girls to be equally affected behaviourally.

In 2013 Royer claimed that 'behaviour and learning are... inextricably woven together, being closely related and interdependent' (p. 327), while researchers such as Beitchman et al. (1996) and Lindsay and Dockrell (2000) have, more specifically, highlighted the links between speech and language and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. It may also seem reasonable to assume that aggressive behaviours can give rise to problems regarding discipline and academic performance at school (Johnston, 1995b). Childcare workers at an Irish prison reported that caregivers visiting the prison often spoke of the difference in their children's behaviour at school since their parents' imprisonment (King, 2002) and, as observed by teachers in Dallaire et al.'s study, such problems can have an impact on children's academic success (2010) and may adversely affect a whole class or school (see Hagan & Foster, 2012). Moore noted the behaviour of one such pupil and said of it: 'If Sheena continues to sit there making her daily protest, the school will be unable to deliver any curriculum' (1992, p. 175). Yet, even if such children remain in school and their behaviour improves, its repercussions can have long-term effects for their futures in the education system. Entwisle and Hayduk (1988) assert that teachers' interpretations of, and responses to, children may follow them throughout their educational lives in formal school records. The effects of those records on teachers' expectations can be significant. Thus, behavioural problems associated with parental incarceration can pose a considerable threat to children's academic success and, ultimately, their prospects, sometimes in unexpected ways.

5.4 Fear, anxiety and guilt

The sudden absence of a parent from a child's life, whether this absence is explained or not, may result in a child experiencing some form of anxiety or fear as he/she attempts to cope with the uncertainty of a new situation. Indeed, research such as that by Murray and Farrington has concluded that children with incarcerated parents are more likely to suffer from anxiety (2008b), especially if they have witnessed incarceration-related events such as criminal activity, arrest, or sentencing (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010). In addition to the anxiety associated with others discovering that their parents are in prison (eg, Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008) and the fear of being stigmatised or bullied (as discussed in Chapter Four), there are a number of other sources of anxiety, some of which are dealt with below.

Children may worry that their fathers will change in some way, worry that the family unit will never be intact again (Boswell & Wedge, 2002), or generally be concerned about their parents' well-being (Murray, 2005). When a child is unaware of a parent's whereabouts, this may be particularly so. For example, one girl asked her grandmother if there was something wrong with her mother as 'she never stayed away this long before' (quoted in King, 2002, p. 30) and I have already referred to the boy who thought his mother was dead because he had not been allowed to visit her while she was in hospital (Stanton, 1980; see section 4.8 – *Explanations given to children for a parent's absence*). However, even children who know their parents are in prison may be tormented by concerns regarding their welfare. One child interviewed by Nesmith and Ruhland was convinced that his father had 'no clothes to wear' and was forced to 'eat bad foods', while another child pictured the father screaming and yelling to get out (2008, p. 1126). Children who have not received adequate explanations/descriptions may tend to base their image of prison on what they have seen or heard on television. Nesmith and Ruhland sum up this problem by saying: 'In the absence of information, children will turn to their imaginations' (2008, p. 1126). Children may worry that their incarcerated fathers are being hurt (especially in cases where they have witnessed the parent being arrested or forcibly removed from the home), that they will not return home or that they may die (Breen, 1995). Many children even have nightmares of such scenarios (eg, Bocknek et al., 2009). On this point, Folk, Dallaire and Zeman have identified some factors that

appear to influence the accuracy of young people's understandings of jail (and offenders) – namely a youth's age, gender and 'degree of criminal justice [system] exposure' (2014, p. 112).

The fantasies that these children have built in their heads are sometimes caused by the lack of information they possess regarding their fathers. In many cases, visits can reduce these anxieties, thus reassuring the children (Boswell & Wedge, 2002; see also Breen, 1995) but, as we have already noted, visits may do more harm than good. Thus, Stanton went a step further than simply recommending visits in stating that *satisfactory* visits could be of benefit to a child (1980) and may have the effect of lowering a child's anxiety, although Murray points out that satisfactory visits were not defined in her study (2005) and we could still reasonably assume that visits are sometimes more part of the problem than the solution. Additionally, children may worry about their parent on the outside, particularly if they seem overworked, stressed or upset (see, for example, Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Chui, 2010; Glover, 2009).

It has been observed that some children worry that they are to blame for their parents' crimes (King, 2002; Vacca, 2008). This is evidenced by one Irish mother, Rachel, who said of her children, 'Is it their fault that he's... in there? They actually asked that once or twice' (McArdle et al., 2014a). These feelings of guilt could stem from a child's lack of understanding of the situation. Alternatively, if the parent has been imprisoned for a crime which might be seen as necessary to support the family (financially or otherwise), children might blame themselves for things such as asking for new games/toys, ripping a school uniform that must then be replaced or perhaps even eating too much, as was the case with one child who stated: 'It was my fault dad was sent to prison because I was hungry and asked for a sandwich' (Ormiston Children & Family Trust, 2007, p. 7). Miller illustrates the importance of reassuring a child that he/she is not to blame for a father's incarceration when she says: 'children who take on this burden may have long-term psychological issues if their beliefs concerning their culpability persist and is [sic] undisputed' (2006, p. 477).

Parkes states that we all live in an 'assumptive world' (1988) in that, when we wake in the morning, we assume things will be as they were when we fell asleep and when a child goes to school, he/she assumes that everything will be as it normally is on his/her return. When a traumatic loss such as death or imprisonment of a loved one occurs, a person's assumptive world shatters and suddenly nothing is certain. Beder describes the experience as 'an abrupt, terrifying disillusionment' (2005, p. 258). Along with the realisation that everything previously had been taken for granted, people begin to recognise that their 'prior assumptions were naïve, that tragedy can strike and that no one is invulnerable' (Janoff-Bulman, 1992, p. 174).

Beder suggests that such a loss may even be detrimental for people who had difficult relationships with, say, their now absent fathers or mothers (2005). Aside from the pain of the loss itself, anxiety and fear can consume a person, particularly a child who may have a limited understanding of the world. This is perhaps especially likely to be true of a child who is not told about an event such as imprisonment. For example, seven-year-old Shaun was described by Moore as being 'afraid that one day he will go home and [find] nobody...there', as he did not know where his father was (1992, p. 171). (I discuss this further in the section 4.8 – *Explanations given to children for a parent's absence*.) Essentially, the shattering of a person's assumptive world is devastating and its restoration may be 'a long and painful process' (Beder, 2005, p. 260). The stigma and other adverse outcomes of parental incarceration can only serve to complicate this process even further for a child.

In cases where his/her parents were already at odds before the incarceration or have become so as a result of it, a child can experience guilt at wanting to visit or talk about the incarcerated parent, feeling that such desires imply a lack of appreciation for all that the remaining parent does, or perhaps even a lack of loyalty to him/her. Indeed, Nesmith and Ruhland found that 'when there was a strained relationship between the caregiver and incarcerated parent, the child sometimes faced the dual stress of worrying about both parents, while feeling pressured to conceal or understate the concern over the incarcerated parent' (2008, p. 1124). Shlafer and Poehlmann encountered children who admitted that they had been in contact with their imprisoned parents without the caregiver's knowledge (2010),

while Nesmith and Ruhland quoted one girl who was contemplating how she might sneak her phone number to her father in prison: 'My mom doesn't want me to give them [dad's side of family] my number. But I want to give it to them because they will give it to my dad and he can call me' (2008, p. 1125).

In addition to the idea that 'stress causes regression' to more childlike behaviour (Lloyd, 1992, p. 182), Moore asserts that in children's 'fertile young imagination[s].... less well-informed, less rational fears... [can become] their constant preoccupation' (1992, p. 176). This may reduce the ability to concentrate. Such preoccupations can have an impact on success at school by decreasing the capacity to learn. Schostak makes an important point:

Those more serious problems that stem from a child's anxieties and unhappiness cannot just be dropped. Children who are abused, who are living through parental divorce, or have experienced a death in the family cannot just suspend their feelings. Children who live in communities that experience racial discrimination, poverty, unemployment, and are deprived of everyday amenities because of unfit housing conditions do not wipe their memories clean as they enter school (1991b, p. 169).

Although parental incarceration is not specifically mentioned here, the same could reasonably be said for school-age children who experience this form of loss.

5.5 Children's health

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the U.S.A. has recognised parental incarceration (or incarceration of a family member more generally) as an adverse childhood experience that is linked to 'a wide range of [negative] health outcomes in adulthood' (Bynum et al., 2010) and other research has identified deteriorations in children's health as one of the most commonly reported problems following parental incarceration (Lowenstein, 1986). This section of the literature review examines findings in relation to physical health and mental health.

In Arditti et al.'s study 27% of participants reported that their children's health had declined after fathers were sent to prison (2003) and, although relating to adolescent children, Lee, Fang and Luo's study found significant positive associations between parental incarceration and eight of the 16 health problems

measured (2013).⁴⁶ Breen makes a useful point regarding the financial implications of incarceration and the health risks this brings, which may serve to explain such findings:

The children of incarcerated parents are at risk of falling victim to serious physical and psychological problems. These problems often stem from the economic stress on the family, which usually means that these children do not receive the regular and preventative medical attention they need. Illness and minor mental health issues that would, under normal circumstances, be treated, go untreated or are ignored until a crisis occurs (1995, pp. 98-99).

Miller goes on to suggest that 'there can be long-term psychological effects or immediate neuro-physiological changes such as loss of speech after a parent goes to prison' (2006, p. 478). While such severe cases as this may be rare, it is perhaps not unreasonable to suggest that, in some instances at least, children's existing health conditions can deteriorate due to stress. As one prisoner's partner in Boswell and Wedge's study claimed: 'She [a daughter] has bad asthma and this seems to have got considerably worse since her dad was convicted. I put this down to stress' (2002, p. 66). While this mother's claim could be considered immaterial due to the 'inconsistent findings' of studies examining the relationship between stress and asthma in children (Caffrey-Craig, 2005, p. 156), there are many alternative ways in which children's health could be affected by stress resulting from a parent's imprisonment. For example, one mother, referring to her son (albeit a 19-year-old son) since his father's incarceration, stated, 'He is not sleeping and he has lost weight' (Glover, 2009, p. 6), while other studies have reported children suffering from insomnia/sleeping problems, enuresis (more commonly referred to as bed wetting, though it may not always take that form) and eating problems (see, for example, Poehlmann, 2005b; Skinner & Swartz, 1989; McEvoy et al., 1999; Kampfner, 1995). While the majority of caregivers in King's study stated that they had not noticed any differences in their children's health, those who had mainly spoke of nightmares or disruption to sleeping patterns (2002).

⁴⁶ The eight health problems associated with parental incarceration were depression, asthma, posttraumatic stress disorder, cholesterol, anxiety, migraine, HIV/AIDS and fair/poor health. The eight problems not found to be significantly linked to parental incarceration were cancer, hypertension, diabetes, heart disease, epilepsy, ADHD, hepatitis and obesity (Lee et al., 2013).

As regards mental health, some evidence has indicated that children with imprisoned parents are at greater risk of suffering depression (eg, Wilbur et al., 2007), internalizing behaviours (Murray & Farrington, 2008a) or mental illness/psychopathology more generally (Murray & Murray, 2010). Indeed, after a review of the relevant research, Murray and Farrington concluded that a child with a parent in prison may be more than twice as likely to develop mental health problems (2008b). However, there has been considerable debate regarding the actual cause of such mental health problems. While some studies have suggested that there might be a causal connection between parental incarceration and child mental illness/psychopathology (eg, Murray & Farrington, 2005, 2008b), others have claimed that this is not the case (eg, Kinner et al., 2007). As noted earlier in this review, parental incarceration is not something generally experienced in isolation and taking account of other possible risk factors might help to explain the higher levels of mental illness reported in children of imprisoned parents. For example, Greenberg claims that child psychopathology is not caused by any one thing alone, but, rather, by a combination of: insecure attachment, children's own characteristics (temperament, biological vulnerability and neurocognitive function), ineffective parenting and family adversity (1999; see also Rutter, 1979; Sameroff, 2000). All of these might apply to children who have parents in prison. Numerous studies have found higher rates of mental health problems among prisoners⁴⁷ and some research has indicated that there may be intergenerational tendencies toward mental illness, either for genetic or environmental reasons (including what Bowlby called the 'medium of family micro-culture'; 1973, p. 367; see also Klein & Pine, 2002; Chui, 2016a), with children of depressed parents possibly three times more likely to experience depression themselves (Weissman et al., 2006). Some researchers have highlighted the role that parental antisocial behaviour might play in increasing the risk of child psychopathology through, for example, harsh and coercive discipline, poor supervision, parental conflict, child and spousal abuse, or exposure to drug or alcohol misuse (see Murray & Murray, 2010).

⁴⁷ For example, Singleton et al. (1998) found rates of depression of 33% and 51% among male and female prisoners, respectively, compared with 8% and 11% in the general population while, in the United States, 56.5% of parents who were state prison inmates and 42.6% of parents who were in federal prisons reported mental health problems in 2004 (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008).

Dallaire and Wilson found that children who witnessed incarceration-related events (i.e. criminal activity, arrest and sentencing of their parents) showed more signs of depression/anxiety than those whose parents were imprisoned but did not witness such events (2010; see also Miller, 2006), while early attachment insecurity combined with later stressful events have also been considered a predictor of psychopathology (Sroufe, 2005).

Some researchers have asserted that the stigmatisation, bullying, teasing and low levels of self-esteem often experienced by children of imprisoned parents also can play a role in the development of mental health problems (see, for example, Sack et al., 1976). Murray and Murray claim that ‘there are likely to be multiple pathways linking parental incarceration, attachment insecurity, and child psychopathology’ (2010, p. 303). There may also be multiple ways in which events or circumstances can act as a buffer against child mental health problems/psychopathology. For example, the child’s tendency towards hopefulness and the presence or absence of social support and stable and affectionate caregiving have been associated with levels of adjustment and may, therefore, be linked to mental health problems in such situations (Hagen, Myers & Mackintosh 2005; Mackintosh et al., 2006).

Ultimately, the unique nature of each case of parental imprisonment can make it extremely difficult to assign blame to any one feature of the experience, especially considering that the link between parental incarceration and mental health problems is not definite. Having reviewed six studies⁴⁸ in 2008 and concluded that parental imprisonment is ‘probably associated with at least double the risk for mental health problems of children’ (2008b, p. 157), Murray and Farrington (along with Sekol in 2012) went on to carry out a more rigorous systematic review that seemed to show parental incarceration was actually *not* associated with higher risk of mental health problems in children (p. 175). As with anything as complicated as mental illness, the very nature of which we cannot agree on with any certainty, never

⁴⁸ These studies looked at the association between parental imprisonment and children’s mental health problems (taken to mean problems with self-concept and self-esteem, rates of neurosis, anxiety disorders, depression, tendency to internalise problems and mental health problems in later life). For a full review, see Murray and Farrington, 2008b.

mind its causes, we may have to reserve a final conclusion here, simply noting the possibility of adverse effects. Nonetheless, we can refer to Bowlby's principle:

What is believed to be essential for mental health is that the infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate and continuous relationship with his [sic] mother (or permanent mother-substitute) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment (1951, p.361).

This type of relationship is very rarely possible in cases of parental incarceration. When a father is imprisoned, he cannot play this role in his child's life and the research suggests that, taken as a whole, some mothers simply 'have a problem balancing the needs of their children with those of the man inside [and] the children's education and health may suffer as a result' (Lloyd, 1992, p. 185). As Santa Claus put it during an interview at an Irish prison:

the one on the outside has to make sure that the dinner is there, that the bills are paid... [and he/she also has] to make sure that the person in... [prison] is not forgotten about... [He/she] is constantly runnin' around and bein' pulled in many directions (McArdle et al., 2014b).

This can make it difficult for the remaining parent to prioritise education or health.

5.6 Resilience

Having emphasised at the beginning of this review that children of incarcerated parents are an extremely diverse group, we must not assume that all children who experience the imprisonment of a parent are destined to lead lives of disadvantage. Some children demonstrate remarkable resilience (see, for example, Hanlon et al., 2005) and this leads to the question why some can overcome such adversity, while many more cannot. There are various possible explanations of this.

In 2008 Nesmith and Ruhland encountered a number of children who had developed considerable strength and maturity as a result of their parents being sent to prison. Some of them had become involved in theatre groups, sports or religion and found that such activities provided outlets for their anger and opportunities to make new friends, while also building their confidence and giving them something else on which to focus (2008). Many of these children also had, or found, strong

support networks, which were of immense benefit. Indeed, there has been evidence to suggest that stable and high-quality parenting or caregiving can provide support and resilience for children during stressful life events (Kobak & Madsen, 2008; Sroufe et al., 1999; Masten et al., 1999). In addition, some research has suggested that children are more likely to be resilient if they have above-average IQ levels (Kandel et al., 1988; Masten et al., 1999), an easy temperament, parental attachment and positive peer relations (Garmezy & Rutter, 1983; Rutter, 1990; Luthar, 2003). In the same way as insecure attachment can promote negative outcomes for children, there is reason to suspect that secure attachment may act as a buffer, thereby promoting resilience (see Sroufe, 2005; Murray & Murray, 2010). However, perhaps this may not be so in cases of extreme familial stress (Belsky, 2005). Finally, Murray and Farrington speculate that there may even be genetic factors that promote resilience in the case of children with incarcerated parents (2008b; for more information see, for example, Caspi et al., 2002; Fergusson, Boden, Horwood, Miller & Kennedy, 2011).

5.7 Conclusion

In reviewing the literature concerning the academic performance, educational outcomes and behaviour of children with incarcerated parents, this chapter has drawn attention to the fact that school-related outcomes (ie, children's *academic lives*) comprise much more than academic performance alone. Research such as that by Nichols et al. (2016), Dallaire et al. (2010) and Friedman and Esselstyn (1965) has emphasised the all-encompassing nature of education and the importance of concepts/issues such as school connectedness, positive academic behaviours (eg, attendance) and children's views towards school. Thus, this portion of the literature review particularly influenced the development of the third research question, which sought to identify the impacts that children's experiences (and the interpretations of these experiences) can have on children's approaches to schoolwork and their attitudes to school and learning, as well as their academic performance.

In exploring the reasons why many children of incarcerated parents display forms of externalising and internalising behaviour, the review demonstrated that any number of factors could be responsible. For example, antisocial behaviour on the part of a child could reflect a desire to be likened to his/her father and withdrawal could be the result of exaggerated fears of being bullied by peers. Thus, the importance of children's interpretations of their own circumstances was highlighted, contributing to the development of the second research question – How are these experiences interpreted by children with incarcerated fathers (and key members in their lives)?

It is clear from the research discussed in this (and previous) chapters that direct and indirect effects of paternal incarceration, complex as they might be, can have 'dire consequences for all family members, but especially so for the children' (Fritsch & Burkhead, 1981, p. 84). By 2017, Irish studies on the effects of parental incarceration on a child - such as those of King (2002), Bedford Row (2007), Martyn (2012) and Donson and Parkes (2012) - had been either concerned with the overall impact of parental imprisonment or focussed on issues such as poverty, parent/child relations or children's rights; while all of this information is positively valuable, there was a dearth of (Irish) research from an educational standpoint. In Chapter Six I proceed to outline the research approach adopted in the current study, which aimed to address this particular deficit.

Chapter Six

Research design

6.1 Introduction

This study sought to describe and analyse the experiences of children in Ireland whose fathers are in prison, exploring and attempting to come to an understanding of how these experiences can have impacts on their academic lives, if, indeed, they do at all. I use the term 'experiences' to refer to the witnessing of events related to a father's incarceration (ie, father's arrest or the illegal acts committed), as well as the physical or legal displacement of children and/or key people in their lives, which coincided with or was a direct result of the father's incarceration. By academic lives, I mean children's approaches to schoolwork, their relationships with teachers and peers, their attitudes to school and learning (within and outside the school setting) and academic performance. I formulated the following research questions in order to address the aims of the research.

- What are the experiences of pre- and primary school children in Ireland who have a father in prison?
- How are these experiences interpreted by children with incarcerated fathers and key members in their lives?
- What impacts do these experiences and interpretations have on children's approaches to schoolwork, their attitudes to school and learning (within and outside of the school setting) and their academic performance?
- What effects do these experiences and interpretations have on interactions relating to children's academic lives (eg, home-school links, children's relationships with teachers and peers)?

I originally considered conducting an entirely different study, one concerned with the effects of paternal incarceration on children's educational outcomes, but I soon began to realise the complexity of the phenomenon that is paternal incarceration. I thus came to see that identifying a causal relationship between this and reduced academic success was an unrealistic and perhaps futile exercise, given the number

of moderating factors that may potentially influence outcomes. Causal effects potentially identified by a researcher, in my view, will never be definitive or sufficiently generalisable.

I reflected on what I wanted this study to achieve (especially considering that it was, to the fullest of my knowledge, the first of its kind in Ireland to focus specifically on these children's experiences in relation to education). I realised that it was imperative that the research be accessible (particularly in its use of language) by a variety of audiences and that it be descriptive enough to give sufficient information regarding common features of the day-to-day lives of children with incarcerated fathers. Such information may be particularly beneficial for those teachers who are in almost daily contact with these children and require some understanding of their circumstances in order to cater for their needs, educational and otherwise. It was with these points in mind (accessibility in general and particularly for teachers) that I designed the research, following a process I outline below.

6.2 A qualitative paradigm - Philosophical assumptions underpinning the research

Before designing or undertaking any research, it is important to consider the paradigm in which the research is positioned and to understand the philosophical assumptions underpinning it. In academic literature the term paradigm is used in a variety of ways and, as a result, it can often be misinterpreted or misunderstood. Indeed, according to Masterman (1970), Kuhn (who initially brought the concept of paradigms to our attention) used the term in 21 different ways, so one might be forgiven for having a less than clear understanding of its true meaning. To assist (or further confuse), Cohen, Manion and Morrison provide a comprehensive definition:

A paradigm is a way of looking at or researching phenomena, a world view, a view of what counts as accepted or correct scientific knowledge or way of working, an 'accepted model or pattern' (Kuhn, 1962:23), a shared belief system or set of principles, the identity of a research community, a way of pursuing knowledge, consensus on what problems are to be investigated and how to investigate them, typical solutions to problems, and an understanding that is more acceptable than its rivals (2011, p. 5).

However, for the purposes of research design, Creswell offers a more structured definition, stating that paradigms are:

beliefs about ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (what counts as knowledge and how knowledge claims are justified), axiology (the role of values in research), and methodology (the process of research) (2013, p. 20).

The exploratory nature of my research questions required a mainly qualitative approach. According to Sarantakos (2013, pp. 36-37), qualitative research is 'guided by the standards and principles of ... a *constructivist ontology* and an *interpretivist epistemology* [original emphasis throughout]'. This research was founded on a constructivist ontology, consistent with the belief that there is no objective reality. What we consider to be reality is that which we have constructed in our minds through our interpretations of the world and events within the world (see, for example, Flick, 2004).

As already noted, epistemology is concerned with knowledge: what constitutes knowledge and how we can come to know something. Interpretivism is (and interpretivist epistemologies are) often associated with Max Weber and the concept of *Verstehen* or understanding (as opposed to *Erklären*, explaining, which is generally more suited to quantitative enquiry; Crotty, 1998, p. 67). Silverman states that interpretivism 'rests on the emphatic denial that we can understand cultural phenomena in causal terms' (1990, p. 126). This resonates well with my own conclusions in relation to paternal incarceration, as referred to above. Interpretivism, for me, is summed up in the words of some American opticians who posted the following on a social media site:

The eye doesn't see. The brain sees. The eye just transmits. So what we see isn't only determined by what comes through the eyes. What we see is affected by our memories, our feelings, and by what we've seen before (Humans of New York, 2014).

Varying perspectives, cultural backgrounds and values mean that the social world is far more complex and individual than the scientific world and, thus, I considered an interpretive epistemology (consistent with Weber's interest in *Verstehen*) to be best suited to my research.

6.3 Research approach

6.3.1 Case study approach

Amongst the best-known definitions of a case study are those that describe it as variously: the examination of an instance in action (MacDonald and Walker, 1977), the study of a bounded system (Stake, 1988) and the study of a particular (Stake, 1995) or a singularity (Bassey, 1999). In 2009 Yin restated a previous technical definition, asserting that:

a case study is an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (p. 18),

adding:

the case study enquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (p. 18).

For the purposes of this research, I had originally hoped to carry out a collective case study, in which a 'case' was defined as a child aged four to 13 years who had a biological father in prison and was living in the Republic of Ireland, along with key figures in his/her life (mother/carer, father, teacher, etc.), forming a number of cluster groups. However, although it is commonplace for students to be warned of there being high non-response/non-participation rates in any population, I could not have predicted the extent to which recruitment became a problem, particularly insofar as the recruitment of child participants was concerned. It was not long before I was forced to make amendments to my initial plan. Although I adhered to that plan by adopting a collective case study (ie, 'a number of single studies investigated jointly for the purpose of inquiring into an issue, phenomenon, group or condition' [Sarantakos, 2013, p. 222]), each case involved a particular set of participants and had its own distinct definition (see Table 1).

Case number	Definition
1	Fathers in Irish prisons who have biological children between the ages of four and 13 years.
2	Mothers or primary carers of children who live in the Republic of Ireland and are experiencing or have recently (ie, in the previous five years) experienced incarceration of a biological father while aged between four and 13 years.
3	Teachers in the Republic of Ireland who have taught children from, or have otherwise professionally engaged with, families in which the (biological) fathers were in prison while the children concerned were aged between four and 13 years.
4	Professionals who, by virtue of their employment, have engaged with children of incarcerated (biological) fathers and their families while the children concerned were aged between four and 13 years.
5	Children aged four to 13 years who live in the Republic of Ireland and whose biological fathers are in prison.

Table 1 Definitions of cases

In the case involving mothers/carers I decided to include recent as well as current paternal incarceration. I reached this decision before the commencement of data generation and following consultations with support group staff who indicated that mothers/carers are often too overwhelmed, upset or busy to engage (and, specifically, to engage *meaningfully*) with such studies when fathers are in prison and children are young. Sack's statement to the effect that mothers' being preoccupied during fathers' sentences renders opportunities for reflection rare (1977) consolidated the view I had then formed that including mothers/carers who could offer the benefits of (recent) hindsight was a wise decision that might offer some valuable insights. The issue under investigation in each of the cases was the phenomenon of paternal incarceration and, in particular, how it pertained to a child's academic life (as defined in the introduction of this chapter).

My rationale for choosing the case study approach stemmed from the needs of the research questions and the overall focus of the study. The research questions demanded an approach that:

- was consistent with the interpretivist paradigm in which the research was located.
- was capable of producing rich, descriptive data.
- would recognise the importance of context in exploring participants' real-life experiences.
- could establish cause and effect and recognise that 'context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects' (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 289).
- could explore a process (but did not necessitate theory generation).
- would recognise the complexity of a phenomenon such as paternal incarceration and have the potential to 'catch unique features that may otherwise be lost in larger scale data... unique features [that] might hold the key to understanding the situation' (Nisbet & Watt, 1984 as cited in Cohen et al., 2011, p. 293).

While portraiture – a method of inquiry that also recognises complex human experiences (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997) – was considered, it was disregarded on account of the central role played by, and visibility of, the researcher which, it was felt, could distract from the true focus of the study.

Of course, as with any form of research, the case study approach has advantages and disadvantages. The most commonly cited advantages of case studies include its being able to provide rich, in-depth, descriptive data with regard to real-life contexts or in natural (uncontrolled) settings and the fact that it allows one to use multiple methods/tools in order to generate data (thus benefitting from the advantages of all of these methods) and to produce an end product that is less esoteric than much research can be. Furthermore, a case study can be carried out effectively by a single researcher and allows him/her to recognise varying interpretations of events or phenomena and provide insights which might be applied to similar situations (see Nisbet & Watt, 1984; Adelman, Kemmis & Jenkins, 1980). In addition, Cohen et al.

have claimed that a case study ‘provides a unique example of real people in real situations... [and enables] readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles’ (2011, p. 289). Thus, accessibility of the research can be enhanced by producing an end product that is less esoteric than much research can be. Finally (and of particular value to the current research), this approach has often been considered ‘a step to action’ (Adelman et al., 1980, p. 60). Generally, findings are easily interpreted and recommendations or proposals made as a result can be readily implemented.

However, critics of the case study approach (and there have been many) focus on issues such as the reduced opportunities for generalisation (which I deal with in the next section), the difficulties associated with cross-checking information, the possibility of selective reporting (and the resultant distortion of results) and personal biases potentially/inevitably introduced by the observer (see, for example, Bell, 2010, p. 9; Sarantakos, 2013, p. 227). With regard to the second point, the sensitive nature of this particular study and the degree of confidentiality it required meant that it was impossible for cross-checking to take place. This is an unfortunate aspect of research into the lives of children of incarcerated parents and possibly one of the factors that has contributed to the dearth of such research. The third point is one which, in many ways, relates to my own personal integrity. However, even if I had been so inclined, I could not imagine the advantage of distorting the results since my aim was to describe and understand the (hitherto undocumented) experiences of children in Ireland whose fathers have been imprisoned. I was not trying to disprove an existing theory or to respond to a previous study. Finally, with regard to personal biases, a discussion of how I addressed the question of bias reduction in this study follows later in the chapter (see section 6.7.3).

6.3.2 Generalisability

Limited generalisability seems to be the most commonly cited criticism of the case study approach (see, for example, Yin, 2009). Like many others, Hammersley (1992) considers that case study research, while producing rich, detailed information, does so ‘at the expense of being able to make useful generalizations to a broader population’ (cited in Thomas, 2013, p. 150). However, this criticism may be the

result of a common and deeply-embedded misconception. It is often thought that a case constitutes what is referred to in other research approaches as a sample, but Cohen et al. have clearly stated that this is not so; a case study is simply that – a study of a case (2011). Unfortunately, some defenders of the case study approach have inadvertently contributed to this belief, responding to criticism of their preferred method by claiming that multiple case studies contribute to greater generalisability. While this may be true it does little to protect the reputation of case studies.

As Cohen et al. point out, generalisation ‘takes many forms’ (2011, p. 242; see, for example, Adelman et al., 1980; Yin, 2009; Macpherson, Brooker & Ainsworth, 2000). Stake has spoken of ‘naturalistic generalisation’ which is made by the reader and is defined as ‘conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life’s affairs’ or sometimes through ‘vicarious experience’ (1995, p. 86). He claims that, in order to create opportunities for such vicarious experiences,

accounts need to be personal, describing the things of our sensory experiences, not failing to attend to the matters that personal curiosity dictates. A narrative account, a story, a chronological presentation, personalistic description, emphasis on time and place provide rich ingredients for vicarious experience (Stake, 1995, p. 87).

In order to enable the reader to make such generalisations, Chapters Seven and Eight incorporate a number of in-depth descriptions and personal accounts.

Verschuren points out that the level of homogeneity/variability of the population being studied affects the ease with which generalisations may be made and that, if researchers studying complex issues via a small number of case studies include the range of appropriate variables, greater claims to generalisability may be made, as complex issues tend to have a ‘much lower variability than separate variables’ (2003, pp. 136-137). Echoing Verschuren, Denscombe suggests that ‘the extent to which findings from the case study can be generalized to other examples in the class depends on how far the case study example is similar to others of its type’ (2007, p. 43). Thus, in discussing my findings I attempt to draw attention (where possible) to how my research participants might compare/contrast to other people in similar circumstances (eg, the overall male prison population).

Bassey has noted that there are few (absolute) generalisations possible in the realm of education and 'even fewer, if any,... useful to experienced teachers' (1999, p. 12). To address this issue he introduced the notion of the 'fuzzy' generalisation, stating that it arises from (qualitative) 'studies of singularities and typically claims that *it is possible, or likely, or unlikely that* what was found in the singularity will be found in similar situations elsewhere [original emphasis]' (1999, p. 12). In other words, inferences may be made on associations. Finally, Bassey speaks of relatability as opposed to generalisability when he says:

an important criterion for judging the merit of a case study is the extent to which the details are sufficient and appropriate for a teacher working in a similar situation to relate his decision making to that described in the case study. The relatability of a case study is more important than its generalizability (1981, p. 85).

It was by this last principle (relatability matters more than generalisability) that I was ultimately governed in this work.

6.4 Data generation

6.4.1 Participants

Twenty-three participants took part in this study. Six of these were fathers in prison. They had been incarcerated due to crimes such as murder and possession of illegal substances and were serving sentences ranging from four and a half years to life. Four were repeat offenders, one was a first-time offender and one did not say if he had previously been in prison. Four of the six fathers had had a child/children with two different women. In total, they had twenty-one children (twenty biological and one not biological). Twelve of the children fitted the criteria for this study, that is, they were biological children who were attending pre-school or primary school in the Republic of Ireland.

Five of the participants were mothers or carers. They had a total of 20 children, 18 of whom had biological fathers who had been incarcerated. Three of these mothers had (three) children who were in pre-school or primary school and whose fathers were in prison at the time of data generation. Two women (one mother and one carer) were speaking retrospectively about their (seven) children's experiences as

their children were teenagers at that time. The carer was a grandmother whose son had been imprisoned and, of the remaining four women, two were still in relationships with their children's fathers and two had separated. Their partners and ex-partners were serving sentences ranging from just over a year to 15 years. Two of these men were repeat offenders, one was a first-time offender and two mothers did not state if the men had previously been imprisoned.

Four participants were professionals who had dealings with children of incarcerated fathers. Three were staff members of a support group for families affected by incarceration and one was a doctor.

Six participants were primary school teachers. At the time of data generation, three were mainstream class teachers, two were Home School Community Liaison (hereafter HSCL)⁴⁹ teachers and one was a Resource (Special Education) teacher. One of the mainstream class teachers referred to her previous experience in a HSCL role. Three of these teachers had taught or had dealings with a considerable number of children with incarcerated fathers and three spoke about one or two specific children who were in their respective classes at the time. Three teachers were working in schools with DEIS⁵⁰ status, one was not and two did not specify.

Two participants were children. Both were boys and both were aged nine years at the time of their participation.

⁴⁹ The HSCL Scheme was first introduced in Ireland in 1990 as a preventative measure aimed at children (particularly those in disadvantaged areas) who were perceived to be at risk of leaving school early or not reaching their full potential educationally (Department of Education and Science, 2006). The scheme was designed to strengthen links between home, school and the wider community with a view to enhancing pupils' learning opportunities (Department of Education and Science, 2006). A teacher who assumes the role of HSCL coordinator works with families and communities in and outside the school setting.

⁵⁰ Schools with DEIS (ie, Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools) status are those schools which, by virtue of the disadvantaged nature of the area in which they are situated, are afforded additional resources and extra staff, as compared to most other schools (as part of the DES's plan to tackle disadvantage and social exclusion in certain communities; see DES, 2017b). DEIS is the Irish word for opportunity.

6.4.2 Participant recruitment

In the first instance, following ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee in Trinity College's School of Education, I contacted the Research Officer of the IPS with regard to obtaining ethical approval from the IPS Research Office. Having received this, I proceeded to attempt to recruit fathers in various prisons around the country via poster displays/information sheets and contacts in the prisons. In order to qualify for the study, a father had to have at least one biological child within the specified age range (four to 13). It was not necessary for these fathers to have been living with their child(ren) prior to incarceration as the study aimed to understand the experiences of *all* children whose fathers were in prison, taking into account the diversity of their individual circumstances. Six men in two different prisons fitted the criteria and were willing to take part in the study.

Following interviews with the men who volunteered for the study, I provided them with information leaflets about the research and my contact details. They were invited to pass these on to the children's mothers if they felt that they (or their children) would like to be involved in the study. I also had posters (containing relevant introductory details about the study and my contact details) displayed in visiting areas of three prisons in different parts of the country. Despite having been contacted by two mothers as a result of these posters (and having driven a considerable distance on two occasions to meet one mother who failed, both times, to make an appearance), this method of recruitment did not prove productive.

Simultaneously, and also following ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee, I was in contact with the few support groups for families of offenders and some community centres in disadvantaged areas. Through these support groups/community centres, I recruited four mothers/carers and three professionals who deal with the children of incarcerated parents. A mother and another professional (a doctor) indicated that they would like to take part in the research.

Attempts were made to recruit child participants (ie, primary and pre-school children) through participants who had previously been interviewed, as well as other parents/carers I had met during visits to a support group for families of offenders. While the majority of these people were reluctant to have their children participate, two were happy to have their children's written accounts analysed.

I was also in contact with a number of family resource centres, social workers and a HSCL Scheme representative, as well as staff members from addiction and homeless services. Although everybody to whom I spoke or with whom I communicated online was very helpful and cooperative, these communications did not result in any participants being recruited.

A call for teacher (and other) participants was published in the December 2015 issue of *InTouch*, a magazine specifically for Irish primary school teachers. Two teachers contacted me as a result of having read this. Having received more information about the research from me via email, they agreed to be interviewed. In February 2016 I sent emails to 1,519 schools throughout the country (311 in Connacht – Galway and Roscommon; 779 in Leinster – Kilkenny, Offaly, Dublin, Kildare, Laois and Westmeath; 292 in Munster – Limerick and Tipperary; and 135 in Ulster – Cavan and Monaghan). I received 14 replies; 11 of these said, in one way or another, 'We don't have any children in that category' (pers. comm., February 11, 2016) and three were interested to find out more about the research. On learning more about the study all three of these teachers indicated that they were willing to be interviewed. One more teacher heard about my research indirectly and also wanted to take part.

6.4.3 Methods of data generation

In 2009 Yin identified 'six sources of evidence' appropriate for use in case study research: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation and physical artefacts (pp. 101-113). For the purposes of this research and in line with the requirements of the specific research questions, interviews, observation and documents seemed to be the sources most suitable. I now discuss each of these in turn.

6.4.3.1 Interviews

Dexter defines an interview as ‘a conversation with a purpose’ (1970, p. 123). While, in reality, the process is more complex than this, it would be quite pleasant for the respondent if, on its completion, that was how he/she viewed it – as a conversation. Over the course of this study, 21 interviews took place in total: six with fathers who were in prison, five with mothers/carers of children whose fathers were/had been in prison, six with teachers of children with incarcerated fathers and four with others who had dealings with children of imprisoned fathers (ie, three support group staff members and one general practitioner).

Some advantages of the interview as a method of data generation include its adaptability, the manner in which verbal, extra-linguistic and prosodic features (intonation, etc.) can be observed, thus, providing rich material (Punch, 2009) and (perhaps especially helpful for some participants in this study) the fact that it does not rely on literacy skills (Cohen et al., 2011). However, as methods go, the interview is not without its weaknesses. It is time consuming, negotiating access can be difficult (even frustrating), there is a risk of bias and considerations relating to anonymity are difficult (see, for further discussion, Punch, 2009; Bell, 2010). Additionally, by comparison to questionnaires and similar tools, more social factors come into play. For example, the respondent and the interviewer must develop some sort of relationship for the duration of the interview(s) and the success (or failure) of this relationship could potentially have an impact on the data generated. As Bassey puts it, the participant’s ‘answers are likely to be influenced by his [sic] view of the researchers’ (1999, p. 81; see also Sarantakos, 2013, pp. 294-295). Participants may also feel more self-conscious or likely to be judged during interviews and may refrain from speaking about something that is not generally socially accepted. For this reason, I took care not to appear like the ‘wise judge’ but rather the ‘interested researcher’ of whom Sarantakos speaks (2013, p. 288). Of particular relevance in the case of this study is the fact that cultural or socio-economic differences between the researcher and participant may be more apparent during an interview. Sarantakos (2013) refers to these types of differences as factors that could affect how forthcoming or honest a respondent is during an interview, while Fontana and Frey speak of the importance of interviewers

considering how they present themselves (as cited in Punch, 2009). For example, if I had worn a suit to an interview, this might have created an overly formal atmosphere and had a negative impact on the level of openness or ease with which the participant spoke (see section 6.8.2 – *Reflexivity*).

There are many types of interviews (and any one interviewing technique can be known by several names, confusing the picture) but the most commonly known are the structured, unstructured and semi-structured. Given the interpretive nature of this research it seemed apt, at first, to choose the unstructured interview. Sarantakos defines unstructured interviews as those which ‘employ unstructured questionnaires (interview schedules) containing a number of open-ended questions, whose wording and order can be changed at will’ (2013, p. 278).

However, I expected that some participants would require more prompts than contained in the (planned) open-ended line of questioning and this proved to be so for all participants. In order to enable such participants to reflect meaningfully on the topic and to offer in-depth responses (leading to rich data), a second set of *semi-structured* interview questions was prepared, in line with the research questions and themes of the literature review. Validity, reliability and bias reduction were given due consideration at all times. Thus, a staff member of a support group for families of prisoners was consulted with regard to the development of these questions and feedback in relation to the proposed questions was sought and received from my supervisor. These interview questions required additional preparation (and, as already noted, more prompts) but, as Cohen puts it, ‘like fishing, interviewing is an activity requiring careful preparation, much patience, and considerable practice if the eventual reward is to be a worthwhile catch’ (1976, p. 82). The semi-structured nature of interviews offered my participants (and me) a certain degree of flexibility (ie, when interesting points were made while a participant was speaking, this type of interview allowed me the flexibility to ask him/her to expand a little more on them). I was quite lucky in that all of my participants were willing to allow me to record our interviews and I was permitted to bring recording devices into the prisons or use those already there.

Docherty and Sandelowski assert that children are ‘the best sources of information about themselves’ (1999, p. 177). For this reason and others (including recommendations under Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child), I had hoped to interview children of incarcerated fathers in my study. However, for ethical reasons this was not possible. In the cases in which children were aware of the imprisonment, most mothers (and some fathers) were uncomfortable with the idea, feeling that it might make their children feel uneasy or cause them to think that they were under scrutiny. Guided at all times by ethical considerations I did not pursue the possibility any further if my initial inquiry was met with hesitation (which it typically was). Throughout the research I was conscious of the fact that these children are, by virtue of their age, deemed to be vulnerable members of society. Retrospective interviews with adults who had experienced paternal incarceration in pre- or primary school were considered. However, the idea was rejected for two reasons. First, hindsight bias might have distorted participants’ memories of events/feelings and, thus, would have compromised findings. Second, due to technological advances and curricular reform (amongst other things), school-related experiences are likely to have changed considerably for all children – including those of incarcerated fathers – over the last decade or two. Consequently, retrospective interviews would not have provided much insight into children’s experiences in *present-day* Irish schools.

6.4.3.2 Observation

Observation, ‘one of the oldest methods of social research’ (Sarantakos, 2013, p. 229), is a method which allows researchers to gather ‘live’ data from ‘naturally occurring social situations’ (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 456). Ideally, I would have directly observed a child in a school over a long period as a method of data collection. However, my own experience as a primary school teacher told me that this might result in the child in question feeling like somewhat of a “lab rat”, especially if he/she were to see me with the parent or carer and then again at school. There are two reasons why I felt that this was not a viable option. First, I did not feel that it was ethically appropriate to put a child who was already, in many ways, vulnerable into a position in which he/she felt singled out and scrutinised. Children can be extremely perceptive; even when people whom they have never met before enter

the classroom to observe them, they seem to know. I had witnessed such events and this led to my second reason. From experience I concluded that children act differently when a stranger enters the classroom to observe; they either wish to befriend him/her, start acting out, or suddenly become apparently the most dedicated student in the class. Thus, there is little 'real' evidence to be procured and there are more drawbacks than advantages to this method when the researcher is not known to the child.

Initially, I considered that it may have been possible to observe a child directly at home (for example, when doing homework) and to use such observations to gather information on his/her approach to schoolwork or learning more generally. However, mothers and other carers whom I interviewed were reluctant to agree to this, appearing to have the same feelings about observation of children at home as I had about observation at school and so the direct observation of children did not take place. The observations recorded during the research were thus primarily of interview participants, although sometimes involved their brief interactions with children (either in person or over the phone). These observations were unstructured. I did not 'use predetermined categories and classifications but [made]... observations in a more natural open-ended way' (Punch, 2005, pp. 179-180). Commencing with this sort of *tabula rasa* reduced the likelihood of essential points being overlooked because they simply did not fit the predefined categories. Punch states that the logic of unstructured observation is that:

categories and concepts for describing and analysing the observational data will emerge later in the research, during the analysis, rather than be brought to the research, or imposed on the data, from the start (2005, pp. 179-180).

I feel that this lends itself more to the underlying principles of interpretivism. Even though my attempts to observe children of incarcerated fathers in their natural social settings were in vain, I still believe that observation has the potential to be an extremely useful method of data generation insofar as understanding this specific group is concerned as it could provide insightful information about children's relationships with peers and teachers as well as their attitudes to school, schoolwork and learning. This may be a direction for future research to take, if the problems discussed above (both ethical and practical) can be overcome.

6.4.3.3 Documents

Documents have the potential to contribute worthwhile data to a case study such as this, sometimes offering a different perspective or alternative means of researching the same topic. As Punch states, 'in conjunction with other data, documents can be important in triangulation' (2009, p. 159). At an early stage I realised that, if permission was granted, the most useful documents to study would be children's school reports and copybooks but I always knew that the likelihood of acquiring and being granted permission to use such documents was slight. Unfortunately, I did not receive access or permission to use examples of either source. However, I was permitted access to standardised test results for two children, short written pieces by two children and a piece of writing by a carer, depicting a true story of a little girl experiencing the emotional effects of paternal incarceration. I garnered valuable information through reading these documents.

Sarantakos lists retrospectivity as one of the main strengths of document studies (2013). Particularly in the case of standardised test scores, the documents I analysed helped to paint a picture of changes or transitions that had taken place in some of the children's academic lives and this added to my understanding of their current circumstances, in a manner consistent with Bronfenbrenner's EST. The documents I analysed added to the richness of data I procured from these children's teachers (as well as other participants) and also increased the reliability of data I obtained from interview participants.

6.5 Data analysis

In analysing the data procured in this study, my aim was 'to transform... and interpret... qualitative data – in a rigorous way – in order to capture the complexities of the social world... [I sought] to explain' (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 3). Consistent with an interpretive case study approach, the analysis was not simply a process that commenced on completion of the data generation process but, rather, an iterative process that occurred throughout the study and, in this way, shaped the research. I began by transcribing interviews. I did this as soon as possible after each session took place. Like Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen and Liamputtong, I believe that 'accurate transcription is a fundamental first step in data analysis' (2007, p. 337).

This first interaction with the raw data was time-consuming but allowed me to become familiar with the specifics of individual contributions made by participants and to get a feel for the data as a whole. To assist me in my analysing the data, I initially considered Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework (2006), which offers a great deal of flexibility. However, I chose to adopt what I felt was a more comprehensive approach (and, thus, one that would serve to increase the reliability of the study) - a set of steps devised by Miles and Huberman in 1994. Their approach has three main elements, which occur simultaneously throughout the process of analysis - data reduction, data display and drawing and verifying conclusions. Having transcribed the interviews verbatim and gathered my documents and such field notes as I had taken during observation I chose to use NVivo, a piece of qualitative data analysis software designed for researchers, for the next stage of the analysis. As data units were often coded with multiple codes/themes and alongside more than just the specific unit of data (see below), the data became quite bulky. Using NVivo rendered the task of managing the numerous themes and codes and the bulky data significantly easier and, I believe, more accurate.

The data was first separated by theme (eg, children's relationships with peers). Bronfenbrenner's EST proved useful in guiding the process of data analysis. For example, many of the themes identified in the data corresponded directly with interactions/influences at various levels of Bronfenbrenner's Model. Thus, it provided not only a framework with which it became possible to visualise the entire data set, but also insight into the relations between variables, which was useful when applying Miles and Huberman's process of analysis. The next step was to attach codes to the raw data. These codes arose from the data, to ensure that the process was in keeping with the interpretive approach I had adopted. Miles and Huberman define codes as 'tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study' (1994, p. 56). If applied consistently, coding is a means of organising the data while simultaneously identifying ideas or attaching meaning within it.

However, as Cohen et al. are at pains to point out,

coding is not a “one-of” exercise; it requires reading and rereading, assigning and reassigning codes, placing and replacing codes, refining codes and coded data; the process is iterative and requires the researcher to go back and forth through the data on maybe several occasions, to ensure consistency and coverage of codes and data (2011, p. 560).

From the outset (ie, the transcription of interviews), I also inserted memos (ideas or reflections that occurred to me as I typed/read/coded). These were substantive, theoretical, methodological or even personal, as circumstances required (Punch, 2009). I found this process particularly useful when the data generation and data analysis phases of the research overlapped. Having identified some provisional themes and ideas, similarities and differences, I brought these back to the field for further exploration and to see how they related to one another (Thomas, 2013).

In the beginning these codes and memos were what Miles and Huberman call *descriptive* codes but, as the process progressed the coding and memoing became more advanced and I started to identify patterns or themes within the data (1994). Essentially, meaning started to emerge. Miles and Huberman provide a list of 13 tactics for generating meaning from data (1994). They also provide an equal number of ways of testing or confirming findings and 12 methods of analysing interview data specifically. These assisted me in the course of my analysis although I should note that some tactics were used far more than others. Throughout the process I used data displays and diagrams - a practice advocated by Miles and Huberman (1994). Punch asserts that displays ‘enable data to be organized and summarized, they show what stage the analysis has reached and they are the basis for further analysis’ (2009, p. 175). As the research continued, the coding (and memoing) became more interpretive. Miles and Huberman call these higher order codes *inferential* or *pattern* codes (1994). Punch says of them that they ‘pull together material into smaller and more meaningful units’ (2009, p. 176). Substantive and theoretical memos were especially relevant during the latter stages of the process as they, too, are concerned with a higher level of abstraction and can assist in the development of propositions or generalisations (Punch, 2009). Finally, I moved into the closing stage of Miles and Huberman’s approach. This involved

'confronting... [my] generalizations with a formalized body of knowledge in the form of constructs or theories' (Punch, 2009, p. 346). It is at this stage that I verified my conclusions. The main concern of such an approach is that the data may be stripped from context and become, to a certain extent, less meaningful (Punch, 2009). To combat this I adopted certain strategies (some suggested by Miles and Huberman) either to ensure that the data did not become detached from context in the first place or to recombine and recontextualise it if this had happened. For example, when coding the data I was careful to highlight not just the specific piece (or data unit), but rather the entire section from which the data unit originated so that the context remained discernible. At all stages of the analysis I considered my own position in the research (see section 6.8).

6.6 Ethical considerations

6.6.1 Ethical approval

Ethics relate to the moral principles that govern people's behaviour and actions, dictating how they conduct themselves. This study required that a particularly large number of ethical implications were considered in order to ensure the well-being, safety and protection of all its participants. Following approval for the initial stages of this study from the School of Education's Research Ethics Committee, I initiated contact with the Research Officer of the IPS who provided details regarding the procedure for obtaining ethical approval from its committee (pers. comm., November 24, 2014). On receiving such approval (in May 2015) I proceeded with my research while remaining mindful of the following considerations.

6.6.2 Consent

Obtaining consent is one of the most important issues in relation to any research involving human participants and it is not, as some might think, simply a matter of getting a signature on a form. It is a process in itself. The most important step in obtaining consent is the first - ensuring that the participant is *fully* informed about the research. It was my responsibility during this study to inform each potential participant as to the purpose of the study, the role that he/she was expected to play and many other facts such as how I would ensure anonymity and data security (both of which I discuss later in this chapter). The next step was to provide potential

participants with sufficient time to consider the information and to decide whether or not they wished to participate in the study. To this end, in my correspondence with the Research Officer of the IPS I requested permission to make information sheets available to potential participants prior to my first visit to each prison. In order to do this I visited two prisons in person to deliver posters, information sheets and sample consent forms and I posted these documents to another, prior to my visits. The consent forms (and information sheets) had been pre-approved by the Research Officer of the IPS and amendments made, as necessary (see section 6.6.5 - *Confidentiality and anonymity* for further details). Given the high rate of literacy difficulties reported in the prison population (see Morgan & Kett, 2003) I also went through the details contained in the information sheet and the consent form with each individual participant. I did likewise with other participants (ie, those who were not incarcerated). Finally, when participants indicated that they were happy to proceed, I invited them to sign a consent form stating that they wished to take part in the study and granting permission for the data to be used/disseminated in the manner defined in the form.

6.6.3 Freedom to withdraw

I made sure the participants were aware of the fact that they were under no obligation to take part in the study and I informed them that they could withdraw (either temporarily or permanently) from the study at any stage if they chose to do so. Additionally, I took measures to ensure that participants did not feel, at any point, that they were under pressure to talk about any topics they were unwilling to discuss.

6.6.4 Accurate representation

Thankfully, all respondents were willing and gave the relevant consent to have their interviews recorded. This eliminated the danger of participants' accounts being misrepresented due to poor memory or inadequate hand-written notes. Transcribed interviews were double-checked for accuracy and then subjected to the scrutiny of repeated analysis.

6.6.5 Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality was paramount to this study. There was a particular need for confidentiality in dealing with a prison, both in relation to specific prison routines/operations and prisoners' participation. To this end, I exercised the appropriate level of confidentiality and, where possible, adopted certain strategies to *guarantee* it. For example, during my visits to prisons I needed to know the range of offences for which participants had been imprisoned. However, I did not want to ask individual participants what type(s) of crime(s) they had committed and, instead, had planned to ask the governor or staff to indicate (at the end of my visit) the *categories* of crimes committed on the part of interviewees. For this purpose I devised a list of seven categories, which were broader than the 16 used by the IPS. As it turned out all the participants openly told me why they had been imprisoned or referred to their crimes in some manner during the interviews, so this was not necessary. Nonetheless, it is important to note that my commitment to confidentiality was an important element at each and every stage.

During the data generation phase of the research confidentiality was particularly vital, as often friends, neighbours and even members of the extended family of an offender can be unaware of somebody's imprisonment and fathers in prison might not want it known that they are participating in a research study. Being conscious of this had implications for how I recruited participants, as well as how and where I contacted and met them. Prior to the distribution of consent forms I was asked by the Research Officer of the IPS to make an amendment to ensure consistency with the 'Exception to confidentiality' clause of the IPS Ethics Guidance Document. The amended piece then read: 'I know that my answers are confidential and anonymous unless there is reason to believe that either I or someone else may be in danger'. With the wellbeing of children to the forefront of my mind and guided, at all times, by the Irish government's Children First guidelines (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011) I ensured that this clause remained clearly visible on the consent forms.

All participants were assured of anonymity. No personal or identifiable information was discussed, recorded, or printed in the study. I considered this to be particularly important in cases where a father had been imprisoned for a high-profile crime.

Participants were identified by numbers rather than their names on interview transcripts (even those solely for my use) and I avoided using the participants' names during interviews so that interview transcripts had no record of this.

6.6.6 Deception and concealment

At no point in this study was an adult deceived or had relevant information concealed from him/her. In fact, I was careful to point out one fact that may have been, I was informed, confusing for offenders. Thus, I ensured that prisoners taking part (especially first-time offenders and those on remand) realised that the study was not connected to, and would in no way influence, their standing before a court, as willingness to take part in certain beneficial courses/workshops can sometimes be considered by judges during sentencing. I was eager to clarify this with each participant to avoid any ambiguity that could later lead to confusion or distress.

However, as regards the children I encountered during the data generation phase of the research, a certain amount of concealment was required. This was particularly necessary in cases in which children had not been told of a father's incarceration, but also in those cases in which I was asked (by mothers) not to reveal why I was there in case the children felt under scrutiny. In every instance, I ascertained from parents/carers the degree of understanding or knowledge of events possessed by children prior to a visit and I was careful not to disclose any information unknown to them, always erring on the side of caution.

6.6.7 Data security

All data generated in the course of this research were stored as required by the Data Protection Act, 1988 and the Data Protection (Amendment) Act, 2003. Interview transcripts were never stored with a participant's name attached. Access to all physical and electronic locations where data were stored was limited to me and the extent of the involved security reflected the sensitivity of the data. For example, physical data were stored in a locked cabinet to which I alone had the key and, where possible, devices were protected by passwords known only to me. All records (including transcripts, digital recordings, etc.) were destroyed on completion of the research.

6.7 Validity, reliability and bias reduction

Reliability and validity are generally thought to be cornerstones of any research project. As to their definitions, Bassey states that:

in the simplest analysis reliability is the extent to which a research fact or finding can be repeated, given the same circumstances, and validity is the extent to which a research fact or finding is what it is claimed to be (1999, p. 75).

While many authors on the topic (including Bassey) seem to highlight the difficult relationship between these concepts and qualitative research as a whole, Cohen et al. have developed a useful list of ‘canons’ of reliability and validity (incorporating qualitative and quantitative considerations) that might be specifically applicable to case study research (2011, p. 295). Many of these can be drawn back to Lincoln and Guba’s earlier concept of *trustworthiness* (1985).

6.7.1 Validity

One way of increasing trustworthiness in case study research is to utilise multiple sources and methods of data generation to address primary research questions, an idea that corresponds with what Cohen et al. call *concurrent validity* (2011). By triangulating one’s forms or sources of data and views in this way the strengths of one method offset the weaknesses of any other (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).⁵¹ This study sought to achieve trustworthiness in this manner, by generating data via interviews with a wide variety of participants, observation and the study of appropriate documents. Something of utmost importance in case study research is holism. While this term may have different meanings for different people (see Verschuren, 2003, pp. 124-125) it is used in this research to mean a condition in which ‘all possible dimensions of the research topic [are covered]’, thus achieving what Sarantakos calls *content validity* (2013). Everything from the careful wording of interview questions to the inclusion of all views (as mentioned above) was calculated to ensure that this was the case.

⁵¹ Creswell and Plano Clark were referring to the advantages of combining quantitative and qualitative research designs, as opposed to those of utilising multiple methods of data generation within qualitative or quantitative research alone (2011).

During data analysis I aimed for *internal validity* by ‘ensuring agreements between different parts of the data... [and meticulously] matching patterns of results’, which Cohen et al. consider vital (2011, p. 295). This study was also undertaken in such a way as to pay heed to principles surrounding *construct validity* (‘the extent to which a particular measure or instrument for data collection conforms to the theoretical context in which it is located’ [Cohen et al., 2011, p. 188]) and *ecological validity* (‘fidelity to the special features of the context in which the study is located’ [Cohen et al., 2011, p. 295]) through, for example, external evaluation of the research instruments, procedures and findings and, as far as possible, prolonged engagement in the field. External validity concerns statistical generalisation and was not altogether relevant to this study as a result.

6.7.2 Reliability

Flick (1998, pp. 231-232) has provided suggestions as to how reliability may be addressed in qualitative research (some of which I have already referred to in relation to validity). In line with these, I took certain steps to increase reliability. First, an ongoing record or audit trail (similar to Yin’s ‘chain of evidence’; 2009, p. 41) was crucial, as was having accuracy checks carried out by participants (or external auditors). The recording of interviews (to which I previously referred in relation to ethics) was also vital, as was checking ‘the appropriateness of the terms of reference of interpretations and their assessment’ (Flick, 1998, p. 231). I felt it was also important to provide sufficient detail about the context, features of the context, participants’ characteristics and researcher’s status in order to allow readers to compare/contrast similar cases with an understanding of my point of view. Finally, I endeavoured to ensure that the data generation and analysis procedures were explained in great detail to increase coherence and reliability throughout the case study, from inception to findings.

6.7.3 Bias reduction

In order to avoid or at least reduce bias within this study I took a number of measures. *All* data during the data generation process were recorded to avoid selective reporting and all reasonable efforts were made to triangulate findings. In the analysis and interpretation of data, I constantly considered rival explanations

and used Miles and Huberman's list of 13 tactics for testing or confirming findings (1994), before having respondent/reviewer checks carried out to confirm the absence of bias. I also made all reasonable attempts to avoid biases of my own in the research. I was conscious that personal biases could develop during my time in the field or, alternatively, be brought to the research. Griffiths states that:

bias comes not from having ethical and political positions – this is inevitable – but from not acknowledging them. Not only does such acknowledgement help to unmask any bias that is implicit in those views, but it also helps to provide a way of responding critically and sensitively to the research (1998, p. 133).

At all times I endeavoured to maintain a vigilant and critical attitude towards my research practice, conscious of how my position (as a teacher, researcher, person with a certain set of values, etc.) might have been affecting the research (see section 6.8).

6.8 Positionality and reflexivity

6.8.1 Positionality

In a piece of research such as this, it is necessary for the researcher to consider and outline his/her position in relation to the context of the study. In this instance, aside from stating such things as my gender (female) and nationality (Irish), it is particularly important to the reader that I draw attention to any personal links I might have to the participants and/or experiences we might have shared. Similarly, I should highlight any personal interaction I might have had with the issue of paternal incarceration or incarceration, more generally.

Prior to the commencement of this study, I had no relationship or contact with any of the participants who took part in this study. Having said this, I visited one particular support group for families of offenders a number of times in order to meet more families affected by imprisonment and become more familiar with the role played by the support group. Insofar as the six teacher participants were concerned, we shared the experience of being primary school teachers, albeit in varying geographical locations and socio-economic settings. And, although officially I did not share the experience of parenthood with mother/father participants during the data generation phase, I was pregnant at that time.

I have not experienced paternal (or maternal) incarceration and neither have my close friends or family members. Prior to the commencement of this study, my only link to the prison system was that my husband worked for the Irish Prison Service for a short period of time – approximately two years. I have not been the victim of any serious crime and, if I – as a primary school teacher – have taught children whose parents have been in prison, I have never been made aware of this fact.

6.8.2 Reflexivity

According to Berger, reflexivity involves the:

turning of the researcher lens back onto oneself to recognize and take responsibility for one's own situatedness within the research and the effect that it may have on the setting and people being studied, questions being asked, data being collected and its interpretation (2015, p. 220).

Essentially, reflexivity requires researchers to evaluate - critically and continuously - how they (or their positionality) might have shaped the research at any stage of the research process and to state openly how this might be so.

My 'age, gender, race, class, nationality, institutional affiliation, historical-personal circumstance, and intellectual predisposition' were all relevant, as they informed how I believed participants in the research perceived me (Chiseri-Strater, 1996, p. 115). For example, in many of the interviews I was obviously pregnant and I came to suspect that this had a positive effect on participants' (especially mothers') perceptions of me, in that it appeared to me to increase the level of ease with which they spoke. This ties in with Berger's view that a researcher's positionality can 'shape the nature of researcher- researched relationship' (2015, p. 220). As previously stated in section 6.4.3.1 - *Interviews*, I was also mindful of how participants' perceptions of me might be influenced by how I dressed and/or behaved during interviews and of the implications of this insofar as participants' honesty and openness were concerned. In other words, I had to be continuously aware of how participants' perceptions of me might have impacts on the data. For example, it was necessary to consider the possibility that participants may have expressed particular opinions (eg, positive views in relation to education) in the belief that they would impress or please me. This is why the triangulation of findings

and the consideration of rival explanations during analysis comprised vital components of the research process. Before interviewing teacher participants, I was careful to remind myself that a shared experience of being a teacher did not equate to a shared experience of teaching children with incarcerated fathers. Thus, I made a conscious effort to focus on what teachers were actually saying, rather than what I might have expected them to say. I believe my lack of interaction with other participant groups (eg, mothers/carers and fathers) prior to the commencement of the research resulted in my being more open-minded and having less preconceived ideas or biases from the outset of the study. On the other hand, my being an “outsider” may have deterred some potential participants from taking part in the study in the first place. On this point, referring to a 2006 paper by De Tona, Berger points out that ‘respondents may be more willing to share their experiences with a researcher whom they perceive as sympathetic to their situation’ (2015, p. 220). Thus, perceptions of me as a researcher may have been more important than my actual status as an insider or outsider.

Finally, in writing in the first-person, I drew attention to the active and ‘self-aware’ role I played throughout the research process (Patton, 2002, p. 65). After all, I agree with James C. Raymond’s assertion that ‘the suppression of the authorial I in academic writing, is, ultimately, a rhetorical ploy... [designed to create] the appearance of objectivity’ (1993, p. 482).

6.9 Conclusion

The dearth of research in relation to children of incarcerated fathers (or such parents, more generally) has been well documented over the years (see, for example, Shaw, 1987; Murray, 2005; Breen, 2008) and the reasons for this are clear. There are difficulties in relation to recruiting participants, retaining participants, methods and ethics; such research is next to impossible to plan before entering the field and, after surmounting all the obstacles, opportunities for generalisation are poor, to say the least. However, I feel that, because of my careful planning, critical practice and considerable patience this study adds significantly to our limited understanding of the academic, social and personal lives of children with incarcerated fathers in Ireland.

Chapter Seven

Findings 1

7.1 Chapter outline

The next two chapters outline the main findings of the research. This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, the experiences of children with incarcerated fathers are explored alongside interpretations of and reactions to these experiences (where available), in order to allow interpretations of each experience to be considered in context. As stated previously, the term ‘experiences’ refers to the witnessing of events related to a father’s incarceration (ie, father’s arrest or the illegal acts committed), as well as the physical or legal displacement of children and/or key people in their lives, which coincided with or was a direct result of the father’s incarceration, to include children’s experiences of visiting prisons. The second section explores findings in relation to the third research question: ‘What impacts do these experiences and interpretations have on children’s attitudes to school and learning, their approaches to schoolwork and their academic performance?’. Chapter Eight examines findings with regard to interactions relating to children’s academic lives.

In the interests of anonymity participants were assigned pseudonyms. In order to allow the reader to identify the category of participant, teachers were given names beginning with the letter T, mothers with the letter M, fathers with the letter F, carers with the letter C, support group staff with the letter S, the General Practitioner with the letter G and young boys (whose written accounts were included) with the letter B (see Appendix 1). For convenience and clarity certain pauses and stumbles have been removed from the passages quoted from interviews and poor enunciation has, in most cases, been amended for ease of reading. For example, when participants spoke of fathers ‘gettin’ ou’ o’ prison’ I have rendered this as ‘getting out of’. However, in a small number of instances I refrained from making such alterations as I felt that to do so would have detracted from the overall meaning of the quotation or removed the sentiment or mood underlying what was being said. For example, when mothers approached teachers crying because they were unable

to control their children, I felt that 'Can ya⁵² make 'im do it?' captures the despair that I believe was in their voices far better than 'Can you make him do it?', which could sound stilted, mannered and thus inauthentic.

SECTION ONE

7.2 Overview

The majority of children discussed in this research experienced some form of (domestic or other) upheaval in addition to the incarceration of fathers. In fact, ten of the 11 parents interviewed described some form of change in children's (or family's) circumstances and teachers' and other professionals' accounts appeared to confirm those of parents. Just one father, Frank, said that his children had not been exposed to things that might be considered in any way disturbing or distracting for them. As he put it: 'They've come from a good home'. Other children, however, had known forms of upheaval that included changes relating to children's carers (or family structure more generally), moving homes, changing schools, experiencing the death of a parent, parental separation, witnessing crimes committed by (and/or arrest of) a father and visiting prisons. Following a comprehensive look at how children interpret the loss of a father through imprisonment, I explore these topics individually.

7.3 Paternal incarceration and interpretations of paternal incarceration

For most children discussed or involved in this research, paternal incarceration resulted in the removal of the father from the family home. Indeed, the majority of fathers in this study appeared to have lived with their children prior to their incarceration. Fourteen participants stated that fathers had resided with their children (although in three cases, children were aged just one year old or younger and so were unlikely to remember the father being at home), four said they had not done so (one child was *in utero* when his father was imprisoned) and one father had lived with two of his children, but not with his child from a previous relationship. Thelma suggested that the imprisonment of a father who did not live with his

⁵² Some Irish idioms are explained hereafter. This one denotes the second-person plural.

children before being taken into custody might not have had as much of an impact as the imprisonment of a father who resided in the family home. However, she added that she *had* encountered cases in which the incarceration of non-resident fathers had had an effect on children, either emotionally or otherwise, and stated that the severity of the effect was largely dependent on the *strength* of the father-child relationship. In this regard, Thelma considered that being a biological father was not necessarily as important as being 'close' and she reported having noticed differences between the reactions of children who had absentee fathers and those whose fathers were involved to some degree.

7.3.1 Relationships between children and fathers

Relationships between children and their fathers were generally described as positive, with participants such as Melissa speaking of close and loving relationships and 'unbelievable' bonds. One child was said to idolise his father, while two children were described as daddys' girls. Flynn explained that his children would tell him things that they would not necessarily tell their mother and several participants referred to fathers bringing their children on outings prior to their incarceration. For example, Flynn stated that he was 'always being bouncy and cheery and go[ing]... places and do[ing] things' with his children, although it must be said that his happy disposition was apparently drug-induced. This being said, Stacey pointed out that children's feelings towards their parents are not always indicative of the quality of their relationships with parents because children routinely love their parents, even those children who live in abusive situations. She said, 'Blood's thicker than water... [Sometimes] they've been belted around the place and God knows what - abused verbally and physically... and some[times] sexually - but they still love their parents'. However, I found no evidence of the studied fathers being abusive and it would seem that, for the most part and for most children whom I surveyed, Teresa's words rang true, in that, 'Daddy was a very important part of their lives and [his incarceration meant that] their relationship [sic] with him... was... just chopped'.

7.3.2 Children's interpretations of fathers' imprisonment

It would appear that how children perceive or interpret a father's absence (or a father's imprisonment) depends largely on what they have been told.

7.3.2.1 Child deception

Seven of the 11 parents/carers interviewed during the course of this research decided not to tell their children (either initially or at all) that their fathers were going to or were in prison. The reasons given for concealing the whereabouts of a father were that parents considered their children were too young to understand or not yet ready to deal with this information, that parents themselves were not sure how to tell the children ('how to say the why or when' - Monica) or simply did not want to tell the children or that parents needed time to process the situation themselves first. All of these children were told that their fathers were working away and some parents gave more detail, telling children that their fathers were, for example, making bunk beds in the army, working in a castle or working for Santy⁵³. Melanie explained that she thought it would be easier for her young child to think her father was at work than it would be for her to try to understand that (or why) he was in prison. Tara stated that, in her experience, children would very rarely be told their fathers were being imprisoned and teachers' accounts generally confirmed that working away seemed to be the most common explanation given to children, but fathers being away on extended holidays was an explanation also mentioned.

7.3.2.2 The relationship between children's age and deception

There was evidence of age being a factor in determining the level of honesty with which parents explained the situation or, at least, the likelihood that children would know the truth. Thelma, who stated that all the children with whom she had dealings were aware of their fathers' whereabouts, attributed this to the fact that she taught in a Senior School, indicating that younger children would be more likely to be unaware of the situation. Tom referred to his own experiences with children of incarcerated fathers to make an observation: 'when they're at a young age – four,

⁵³ The Irish idiom for Santa Claus.

five, six - ... I don't think they are told... exactly what's going on'. And Flynn claimed that he was hoping to be released before his youngest daughter was old enough to realise he was in prison. In two cases in which children were initially deceived, the older children in the families subsequently found out or were informed of their fathers' whereabouts, whereas the younger children were left in the dark. This may be attributable to the fact that parents could not hide the truth from older children who had access to other sources of information such as newspapers or that parents were keen to enlist the help of older children in ensuring that younger children in a family did not find out where their father was. For example, Frank explained that his eldest son had been taunted by peers and told his father was a drug dealer; he instructed his son to make sure that such remarks or taunts were 'never said in front of the younger two'. Similar to parents' accounts, teachers noted that some children were told where their fathers were and some were not, while three of the six teachers reported cases in which the older children in families knew the truth, while the younger children were 'blissfully unaware' (Teresa).

7.3.2.3 Children finding out the truth

All seven of the parents who initially deceived their children revealed that their children subsequently found out or were told the truth, although only one mother stated that she had set out purposefully to tell her child:

He thought he worked for Santy... That's what I told him and I was afraid then, with him going to school and him saying, 'My daddy works for Santy'..., [that] children [would] be saying that nobody's daddy works for Santy. So I ended up telling him... that his daddy was in jail.

This would appear to confirm the suggestion that, at some point and in some way, as Mary put it, 'it comes out' and it was clear from the data that parents could often underestimate their children's social intelligence or the motivating force of children's suspicions in this regard. Indeed, most of these particular children grew suspicious, for a variety of reasons. Fergal, who first claimed that his son did not know he was in prison, proceeded to explain that his son had become suspicious after seeing prison guards during visits to a prison and after overhearing his cousins asking his mother questions in relation to, for example, his expected release date.

Despite the boy having reportedly declared to his father, 'Look da... you're in jail', by the time of data generation, Fergal had continued to deny it. A similar case was that of Melanie's four-year old daughter who had been told her father was working in a castle. Melanie thought her daughter might have overheard adults talking because the little girl turned to her mother one day and said, 'Daddy's in jail'. This claim was also rejected by Melanie, who told her that jail was 'just the castle's name'.

Flynn's son, who was growing suspicious, memorised the spelling of the word prison and asked his teacher what the word was. Flynn, believing that his children were 'old enough and wise enough' to know at that point, explained the situation to them. Frank and his wife felt they had to tell their children because they had realised where their father was when they went to visit him. Previously, they had been asking their parents why they had to wait for Frank to contact them and why *they* could not contact him. Mary decided to wait to tell her daughter about her father's incarceration, saying to herself, 'Look, after a while I can explain [it] to her'. However, before she could do so, her daughter (who had voiced her suspicions from the outset) found out: 'She heard talk... they hear bits'. And Melanie, who had not told her daughter where her father was, stated, 'I think she kind of knows now'.

While some teachers referred to children having an 'inkling' (Tracy), Thelma stated that all the children with whom she had dealt knew where their fathers were. Sarah recalled a conversation she had with one mother, during which she said, 'I can guarantee your son knows damn well where his father is and the worst thing you can [do is] tell a child lies'. It eventually became clear that the boy *had* known where his father was the whole time and Sarah pointed out the intuitive nature of children in this regard:

When you're sitting down at home at night and you're crying after your boyfriend because he's in jail, believe me, the first person that picks up on the tension and the stress is a child. And they always pick... up on everything [original emphasis throughout].

However, Tom felt that a child's level of intelligence would play a part. Referring to a boy in his class, he said:

I'd say he believed it because... the fella, mentally, would have been a good bit behind.... There were certain other children in the class who..., had it been them, they probably would know straight away, but in his case, I'd say he did believe that his dad was away working.

Tom, along with others, pointed out the risk of children hearing the truth from friends or other people at school. And, indeed, Monica told the story of a child who was completely unaware of his father's imprisonment, despite visiting him 'at work' weekly. While on a school trip one day, the boy pointed out the prison as they passed, reportedly stating, 'My father works in there'. The other boys were quick to tell him, 'No, that's jail' and Monica claimed he was traumatised by the revelation. Sometimes people might spread the word of a father's situation with casual disregard for the family concerned or perhaps even in malice. For instance, Frank claimed that parents (particularly single parents) in the area in which he lived 'wouldn't have any problem telling their kids where someone else's parent was', knowing that the children most likely would not keep the information to themselves.

A child finding out about a father's imprisonment can be an upsetting experience, for both children and parents. For example, Melissa described her son's (and her own) reaction: 'He cried. He was upset and he did cry and I cried because... I knew I was hurting him'. While some participants believed it was best for children to know, others disagreed, but Tracy had asked a boy about this and, thus, was able to offer insight into children's views on the matter, albeit views that were quite possibly influenced by those of his mother. Initially, this boy had not known where his father was and had been told by two classmates. He was said to have been extremely upset by the news and when Tracy asked him if he thought it was a good thing that he knew the truth, he reportedly said, 'Well... maybe I shouldn't know'. She inquired, 'Well, now that you do know, do you think it's a good thing?', to which he gave a non-committal reply. Reflecting on this, Tracy said, 'I think he actually... would've preferred maybe to not know [sic]'.

7.3.2.4 Partial deception

In the cases in which parents told children where the father was, some were reluctant to give any further details such as *why* it was so. As Stacey put it, children were told ‘as much as [parents considered] they could understand’. For example, Frank told his children that he was imprisoned as a result of motoring offences. He thought that they would find that explanation easier to comprehend than the true reason for his incarceration, which was drug possession. Melissa told her child that his father was in prison because he had been ‘drinkin’ pints down the pub’. She gave three reasons for doing this. Firstly, she did not know how to explain the use of illegal drugs to a child. Second, she felt that he was too young to find out about drugs, adding that she would refrain from telling him such details until he was older. Finally, she thought that the truth might affect the way in which her son viewed his father and she did not want her son to have a negative perception of him:

I didn't want him to be afraid... because you know the way [children] associate bad men with prison and... I didn't want him to ever feel afraid of [Name of father in prison]... That's why I played it down I suppose... to just drinkin' beer... because I didn't want him to be afraid.

Teresa explained that she was not sure what the children in her school had been told or what each understood about her father's imprisonment (or, indeed, the crime that had been committed).

They knew that something really bad had happened... definitely, but what Mom told them in the initial stages, or... as things went on, I'm not sure... I think part of the problem was possibly that they didn't really know, that they knew something really bad had happened but they weren't sure and they weren't sure where [their father] fitted into the picture. And maybe there were conflicting people saying 'Oh... it's all a mistake. He'll be back' and somebody else saying, 'Oh, well... maybe not'... There's a lot of initial confusion.

Thelma believed that most of the children of incarcerated fathers she had taught would have known that their fathers were in prison but that they might not necessarily have known why, pointing out that none of the mothers she knew would be inclined to say to their children, ‘Your father's in prison because he's a bad man’, as she surmised that no mother would want their children to believe that of a father. And Sarah suggested that the way in which children were treated in 2016 differed to how they had been treated in the past, claiming that this could have an impact on

how they interpreted fathers' situations. 'Going back to 1999, there was a lot more secrecy around imprisonment and there would be less said in front of children. Now, children sit at the kitchen table and everything is discussed'.

7.3.2.5 Interpretations/reactions of children who were deceived

Children who were unaware of their fathers' whereabouts or the reasons for their absences were generally considered to be sad or upset by their fathers' disappearance and were said routinely to miss their fathers after they had been taken into custody. For example, Mary's daughter was very perturbed when her father was first imprisoned and she cried every night. She slept on a pillowcase that had a photograph of her parents on it and she kissed her father's image every night and whispered, 'I love you'. Tom recalled a child being upset for no apparent reason (only *during* his father's sentence), while Fergal claimed his absence had broken his son's heart. A considerable number of these children were reported to make statements such as 'I wish daddy was here' or 'I want you to come home' on a continual basis.

The confusion caused by a failure to explain a father's absence was a recurring theme in the research and the results of this can have huge repercussions for how a child interprets a father's absence. For example, the boy who had been told his father was imprisoned for 'drinkin' pints' found this very difficult to comprehend. Perhaps he was aware of other people who drank beer and had not been punished for doing so. His mother, Melissa, said:

He questions me. 'Why, mammy, so long in jail for drinkin' pints?' and I just said, 'Look, your daddy wouldn't listen... and he kept being told not to do it and he kept doing it'.

Teresa said of the children in her care, 'They didn't understand what was going on. It was never really explained to them', while Tara spoke about the difficulty children in her school were experiencing in comprehending their fathers' absences: 'they're completely confused around where dad is and so they're, kind of, trying to figure that out in their own heads'. She explained that parents were often reluctant to tell children, particularly if the father was being incarcerated for the first time, adding that children were sometimes too afraid to ask questions and, even if they did so,

their questions were most likely to be glibly passed over. Tara stated that she had no doubt but that the children who knew where their fathers were and had been told in what she considered to be 'the right way' (ie, 'as quickly and as early as possible' and in such a way as to de-stigmatise imprisonment) dealt with the situation much more successfully than those who were unaware of the facts.

An overall lack of understanding of the situation and the resultant confusion can give rise to a lot of unnecessary anxiety in children. Teachers described children who appeared to be preoccupied with concerns about their fathers and whose worries were sometimes unnoticed by parents. For example, a boy whose father was imprisoned was told the father had gone to France on a long holiday. His teacher, Tracy, immediately noticed a change in the boy, who became extremely anxious. She stated, 'Then all the worrying started... it really did start straight away'. Months later, after he had found out where his father really was, the boy explained to Tracy that, sometime after his father left, there were mass shootings in Paris reported on the news and, with no word from his father, 'his biggest worry was that his dad was... shot'. He became very anxious around that time and resorted to sneaking up the stairs at home with his little sister to watch the news every evening; if 'daddy wasn't on the news, they knew he was okay'. Despite being extremely upset about the reality, Tracy considered it a positive thing that he found out because his anxiety appeared to dissipate immediately and, as she pointed out, she was then at least in a position to address his loss because it had been 'a big elephant in the room beforehand'.

Confusion can also result in children questioning parents' love for them and may prompt feelings of rejection. For example, one girl could not understand why her father could not attend her Confirmation ceremony and, although not entirely within the realm of this study, Monica told the story of a boy who had never been informed of his mother's incarceration. His mother managed to arrange meetings with her son at a public place once a month so that she could continue to conceal the truth. However, without a clear explanation as to why his mother had left, the boy grew up feeling rejected and ended up turning to a life involving crime and drugs. Years later, when he knew the truth, he reportedly said, 'If I'd known where she was,

I would have known she *did* love me, she did want to be with me but she's in prison [original emphasis]... I thought she just left me'. The young man was in prison at the time of my being told this story. In a similar vein, Fergal (who had not seen his daughter in approximately ten years due to her mother's reluctance to allow the girl to visit a prison) felt that a child's perception of his/her father and his absence or imprisonment could be influenced by 'whatever people are telling the kid' and feared that some children (perhaps his daughter) would think, 'Maybe my daddy doesn't want to know me... maybe he has no interest'.

7.3.2.6 Being honest with children

Four of the 11 parents/carers interviewed reported being completely honest and open about fathers' imprisonment from the outset. As Fred put it:

I'm straight wit' 'em. I tell 'em the truth. I don't make up stories an' I don't mollycoddle 'em... I tell 'em as it is... sometimes they are happy 'cause they're told straight out and sometimes... it's a kick in the teeth for them... But I think honesty is the best part of bein' straight with them.

The reasons parents gave for being forthcoming or honest about imprisonment can be summarised by Mary's succinct phrase – 'it comes out'. Most of these parents/carers believed that their children would, most likely, hear snippets of conversations, grow suspicious on visits or be told by somebody else that the father was in prison. Some spoke about the ramifications this could have for their relationships with their children, particularly in relation to trust; Mary said 'Oh I'd prefer to tell mine because... it falls back on you if the truth comes out and the kids knows [sic] that, "Oh he was locked up and your mother didn't tell you" '. Some said they would rather tell the children themselves so that they could exert some control over what the children heard or how they heard it: 'better coming from my mouth than anybody else's'; while others simply thought their children were too clever to believe any other excuse - 'they're not... stupid, like'. Tara believed that it was impossible to hide something of such significance from children, especially given the 'chaos going on around' the imprisonment. She stated, 'They know damn well what's happening'.

The majority of professionals to whom I spoke (who dealt with children of incarcerated parents daily) were of the opinion that honesty was the best policy and encouraged parents to be honest with their children from the outset. It was considered by some participants to be more pressing that children of fathers serving *long* sentences were told the truth.

7.3.2.7 Interpretations/reactions of children who were told the truth

Similar to the cases in which children were unaware of a father's whereabouts, children who were told or found out the truth appeared to have routinely had negative interpretations of a father's imprisonment. Almost all participants referred to their children (or the children in their care) missing their fathers and/or constantly asking how much longer they would have to wait before being reunited. Mary, whose daughter was 'constantly sick' believed it was a form of home sickness caused by missing her father and Stacey spoke of children displaying signs of separation anxiety. The most commonly mentioned emotions children appeared to experience were anger, sadness, upset, confusion and disappointment and these could often be experienced by the same child at different times. As Fred, referring to his children, put it: 'Sometimes it's anger, sometimes it's upset and sometimes it's just [being] plain sad'. It appeared that children's emotional reactions were not necessarily constant, in that, many participants referred to bad days or children seeming okay one day and then very upset the next, although they were unsure of what exactly triggered these random bouts of sadness. Fintan stated that he had no doubt but that his imprisonment was the cause of his son's anger, stating, 'I'm the reason he's angry'. And two fathers said that children were particularly confused in relation to the appeal process. For example, Finbar said that, when he informed his children of his impending court date, they were under the impression he was coming home on that date.

Some talked about their children being upset when their fathers were not there for important events in their lives, such as birthdays and First Communions. For example, Melissa, who said her son would not usually speak about his father's imprisonment as something that upset him, believed that his distress was always 'lying underneath'. She recalled her son getting upset on the morning of his

Communion: 'when he was reading his card from me and his daddy... I asked him what was wrong and he just said, "I think it's terrible that my daddy's not here for such a big day" '.

For other children, it was during the simple, daily activities such as walking the dogs that they most felt a father's absence; participants spoke of children being sad, angry and/or upset because their fathers were no longer present in their daily lives. For example, Melanie's daughter, whose father previously brought chocolate home for his children after being at the gym, told her father that she could not wait for him to get out of prison so he could do that again. And Fergal's son was 'heartbroken' because his father was not there to collect him from school to play football with him.

There were some references made to age being a moderating factor with regard to how much children appeared to be affected by a father's incarceration or how they reacted to the situation. Five participants claimed that a father's incarceration had more of an impact on older children in a family for two reasons. Firstly, their relationships had been more firmly established. For example, Thelma spoke about the 'big gap' left by a father's departure from the home for older children and Monica claimed her older daughter was more affected by her father's absence because she had had a relationship with him before his prison sentence, whereas her other child was just one year old when their father was imprisoned. Second, it was believed that an older child might have had a better understanding of what was happening or might realise that it was not a normal situation. For example, Thelma spoke about paternal imprisonment being normalised in instances involving younger children who knew no different and Teresa claimed that, while the older children in one particular family had been 'knocked... for six' and were 'heartbroken',

the younger children [appeared to be]... happier. They were just blissfully unaware of... an awful lot of it... [They visited their father] when they were brought but really it meant much less to them... Their mum was there and that was enough, whereas the older children – the daddy was a very important part of their... lives.

One young boy was said to have never understood that his father was in prison and his lack of understanding was considered to have ‘shaded’ and ‘protected’ him from much of the upheaval. According to Stacey, he wasn’t affected at all. Stacey also spoke about a boy whose mother believed that his father’s incarceration was unlikely to have had any effect on her son because he had been just five years old at the time and so would not have known any better or understood what was happening. But she had pointed out to the boy’s mother: ‘if a foetus in the womb can actually feel what’s going on and the emotions from the mother, what less can a five-year-old [feel]?’. In line with this, Carol did not believe disparate reactions to paternal incarceration was an age-related issue as two of her grandchildren (between whom there was just one year difference in age) had had very different reactions to, and varying levels of success with regard to how well they coped with, the situation. And while Fred said his middle child (of three) was ‘hit’ the hardest, Fintan reported that his *youngest* son was actually most affected by his imprisonment. Contrary to the comments above, he believed his son’s lack of understanding could have been the reason why this was the case: ‘he’s only coming up and understanding, whereas the others were always [a] bit older... and understood’.

For some, the imprisonment of their fathers was seen as a form of loss similar to bereavement. For example, according to Monica, her daughter who attended the Rainbows Programme⁵⁴ after school would come home saying things such as: ‘[Gemma⁵⁵]’s dad is dead and my dad’s in prison so it’s kind of the same thing... it is a bereavement I’m going through’. However, this could be more indicative of the Rainbows facilitators’ interpretation of imprisonment than that of the girl. But Teresa described a child’s reaction while attending the funeral of her classmate’s father: ‘The little girl whose dad was in prison was beside herself. She was so upset. She could really relate to [the child whose father had died]’. Teresa believed that the comparison between imprisonment and death was particularly apt in that specific case for two reasons. Firstly, the girl’s father was serving a life sentence.

⁵⁴ An Irish (out-of-school) programme that supports children affected by loss, usually through bereavement, separation or divorce.

⁵⁵ This name was changed in order to protect the identities of participants and those around them.

Teresa pointed out that, while absence of a father for a few weeks or a few months is very difficult, an indefinite period of time is 'a life sentence for the children as well'. The second reason why this girl's loss was similar to a bereavement was that her mother had 'moved on' and was no longer prepared to bring her children to visit their father in prison and, as a result, the girl had no opportunity to see her father at all. Teresa identified, however, one important difference between bereavement and imprisonment and that was that the girl whose father was in prison, unlike her counterpart, had not had been afforded 'an opportunity to grieve'.

For others, the imprisonment of a father was a threat to feelings of security and often resulted in children becoming more dependent on other carers (usually mothers). For example, Tara noted some children's reluctance to leave their mothers each morning and described how one child tended to react on seeing her mother in the school during school hours (after her father's imprisonment): '[There is] not a bother on her in school but if she sees... her mam in school and she can't go home with her... she's like a different child... there's a real fear around the attachment side of it'. One boy in particular – Fintan's youngest son - saw his father's incarceration as a life-changing event. His mother committed suicide shortly after his father's prison sentence started and he apparently blamed Fintan for the entire chain of events that led to his mother's death. As Fintan put it: 'the way he looked at it was, if I didn't come back to prison, everything would have been still okay'. The boy also considered his father's crime (which resulted in his imprisonment) to have been a purposeful choice. Fintan explained that his son did not feel loved because 'the way he's looking at it, I chose drugs before him'. Having had a pleasant relationship prior to the imprisonment, the boy had ceased even to acknowledge his father following his mother's suicide (a topic discussed in more detail later, in section 8.3.1) and had displayed extremely angry behaviour: 'shoutin' at everyone around him [in] anger - just tunnel anger'.

The incarceration of a father was perceived by some as a shameful secret. For example, Barry was scared that people would find out where his father was and that they 'wouldn't have anything to do with' him. But Monica, although stating that her daughter (and other children in similar circumstances in her daughter's class) never

spoke about her father's imprisonment, claimed that children did not necessarily set out to hide the facts. And Thelma claimed the children in her school would have 'no shame in telling you, "Daddy's inside" '. The issue of secrecy is discussed further in Chapter Eight.

It was clear from the data that paternal incarceration was often the impetus that led to children assuming new roles in the household. On a father's removal from the home, some children felt they had to assume new roles or were even explicitly told this. For example, one child was described by Teresa as a 'second mother-figure' and another boy became 'very protective [original emphasis]' of his little sister, a feature of their relationship that (according to his teacher, Tracy) had definitely not been as strong prior to his father's incarceration as it was afterwards. Thus, when his sister won a prize in a school raffle, her teacher suggested she go to her brother's classroom to tell him. Tracy described the encounter:

when she came down to tell him that she won, he stood up and he just automatically went and gave her a big huge hug. And he was like, 'Oh [Name of sister]! That's amazing!'.

Tracy pointed out that:

no other kid would hug their baby sister and be so proud of her... They'd be... trying to act cool or whatever. But he's so loving, so protective of her.

After this boy had found out about his father's imprisonment, his most pressing concern was how his sister was going to cope when she found out the truth and he spoke to his teacher about this worry. Tracy stated that the (almost paternal) role he had assumed was actually something that caused her to worry about him. As she put it, 'that's *not* his role [original emphasis]' and she described some work she had undertaken with him to help him to realise that each person (ie, his father, his mother, his sister, the boy himself) had their own paths to lead and that all he could do was be a 'bright, shining example' for his sister. The topic of the roles children play in families is discussed further in sections 7.4 and 8.2.

There was some evidence to suggest that the environment or culture in which a child lives might be significant and/or have an impact on how a child interprets a father's incarceration. For example, Flynn and Frank believed that living and going to school in areas in which parental imprisonment was (and one-parent families were) relatively common had meant their children did not necessarily stand out.

And Thelma suggested that, in gang-land cultures, a child's perception of his father, the crime committed by him and his subsequent imprisonment can be influenced by the community's perceptions, or that the community's views might even be assumed by the child. She stated that this sometimes can be linked to a father's importance within a gang and a father's position can influence 'how much the child looks up to the dad or sees the dad as someone very important'. She explained that the higher up in the gang the father is, the more respect the child might have for him; his position might be a 'source of slight pride or awe – awe in the old awesome sense, you know, that scary awe'. Thelma pointed out that, although he might be:

negatively important... he's [still] important in the child's eyes [emphasis added]. Whereas, if it's a dad who's put down [ie, imprisoned] for an ordinary, run-of-the-mill 'I stole 24 cans and then I beat up the shop owner' [type of crime],... there's a different reaction.

Thelma stated that some children - those whose fathers were 'high-up' in particular gangs - certainly appeared to be proud of these men. And while this might be linked more to criminality than imprisonment, the incarceration of a father who remains loyal to his gang (ie, does not "rat") can be viewed by others in the community as a form of sacrifice and the families of those men can be 'quite celebrated'. For example, Thelma explained that when a father is released:

after going in for something for the gangs, [the family gets] money [and] a holiday... Your mam is looked after to a certain extent while your... father's inside. So [the whole family] would be, kind of, treated better [and].... viewed slightly heroically.

In cases of this kind, she reported children having said things such as 'My father's inside for us', suggesting that they perceived a father's imprisonment to be a form of sacrifice made with the families in mind. On the other hand, if a father went to prison but "ratted" on his fellow gang-members, the family would probably have no

other choice but to leave the area if they were to avoid the repercussions. Thelma explained that such an act would be seen as shameful and would, most likely, have an effect on a child's perceptions of his/her father's imprisonment: 'To be a rat is a *terrible* thing... It really is. It's not just in the movies'. Thelma's account also suggested that families of men who had committed particular crimes, such as defilement of children, could also suffer as a result of a community's views of the crime. An example of this is discussed in the section relating to children's relationships with peers (8.6).

Similarly, how imprisonment is portrayed by parents can affect how children perceive the imprisonment of a father. On the one hand, some parents were determined that their children would understand that being imprisoned was not something to which one should aspire. For example, Flynn told his children about his imprisonment in the following way: 'Listen, I was in jail because I done [sic] wrong. I was being bold and... I broke the law and I had to come to jail'. He said that he would not 'flaunt' or be proud of his incarceration and that he had tried to explain to his children that jail was not the "place to be" and that he believed his actions were wrong and something he regretted. As he put it, 'I'd rather be out and... be able to have my life with yous⁵⁶ than be in here missing out over silliness and stuff that I've done'. Monica reported having told her children from a young age that their father's actions were wrong, adding, 'Ye⁵⁷ shouldn't have to visit a prison... He should be out here with ye'. Despite the fact that these parents had separated, she insisted that she had not told the children this in an attempt to turn her children against their father, but that they needed to know that what he had done was wrong. On the other hand, according to Thelma, parents sometimes paint a relatively pleasant picture of prison and fathers in particular are likely to emphasise the positive features of prison life. As she put it:

I think [fathers] present this great picture of, 'Oh sure, you're in the gym and... you get a Chinese [dinner] and ... it's all lads together and sure it's great fun'... They don't present it as this horrible place. They present it as... a great spot... you just can't get out. That's the only difference.

⁵⁶ Idiomatic urban English in Ireland has a distinct second-person plural, *yous*.

⁵⁷ *Ye*, an otherwise defunct second-person plural pronoun, remains in common use in parts of Ireland, especially rural areas.

Sarah reported having worked intensively with one particular father (of a boy who had stated that he planned to join his father in prison), so that he would speak about his sentence in negative terms and tell his son, 'This is what you don't want. This is what I don't want for you'. At the time of writing, it was unclear if the intervention had made any difference to the boy's plans.

But, in contrast to those mothers/carers who attempted to 'make things as normal as possible' and ensure that their children were not afraid of or frightened by prisons (and did not have negative perceptions of their fathers because they were imprisoned), two mothers were of the belief that children *should* be scared of prison. For example, Tracy, who wanted to read the book *The night Dad went to jail*⁵⁸ to a child in her class, was asked by the child's mother not to do so because she believed that 'jail was *supposed* to be a scary place [original emphasis]'. The boy's mother did not want her son reading a book that depicted prison as anything other than that because she did not want him to think that it was acceptable for his father to have been imprisoned 'because it wasn't okay'. Indeed, it was clear from the data that some children *did* fear prison and the possibility of being imprisoned. Their paltry understandings of the justice system sometimes even resulted in fears that they themselves would automatically be imprisoned because their fathers had been. For example, Tracy remembered reading a worry a boy in her class had written down; he was concerned that he would 'turn out like his dad' and anxious that he was 'going to be put in jail because people [would] know about his dad'. Another child was afraid that if she got anything wrong in school or did not do her homework, she would get into trouble and she feared, if this happened frequently, that she would be sent to prison (Stacey), while Tara and Thelma spoke about children's perceptions of imprisonment as inevitably being part of their futures. This theme is discussed further in section two of this chapter.

⁵⁸ *The night Dad went to jail* is a book by Melissa Higgins. It tells the story of a young rabbit named Sketch whose father is sentenced to six years in prison. With child-friendly drawings and age-appropriate explanations of terms such as 'laws', it attempts to prepare children for what they might expect to happen when fathers are imprisoned, in a comforting, non-frightening manner (Higgins, 2011).

However, as some participants pointed out, having a father in prison seemed to have had the effect of normalising imprisonment and removing the stigma around it. For these children (and families), imprisonment had become simply a part of their lives. Indeed, seven participants (including four parents) claimed that their children considered their fathers' imprisonment to be quite a normal (or, at least, not shocking) event. For instance, Finbar, speaking of his children, said he felt it was 'nothing to them' and, as previously mentioned, Thelma stated that most children of criminals whom she knew had no shame in telling her that/when their fathers were incarcerated. This was suggested to have been particularly true of children of repeat offenders, who had become accustomed to their fathers going 'in and out' of prison, or children who were very young when their fathers were incarcerated and did not remember the father ever having been at home. But Carol pointed out that children, like her daughter, who behaved as if it was not an overly-significant event might actually have been pretending it was so or that it did not bother them (in the same manner as she herself had done) and she believed that adults' acceptance of paternal incarceration as a relatively normal event resulted in those adults forgetting about the children involved and how a father's imprisonment might be interpreted by a child.

7.3.3 Other people's interpretations of fathers' imprisonment

Participants in this research had their own interpretations of incarceration and, in particular, paternal incarceration. Some felt that it had, in recent years, become more common and somewhat socially accepted to have a family member in prison; Sarah stated that there was no longer a stigma around imprisonment. Having said this, Monica and Thelma claimed that they themselves would '*die* [original emphasis]' of shame and embarrassment if any of their children or family members (respectively) were to be incarcerated. And Teresa was firmly of the opinion that there *was* a stigma associated with imprisonment and that it caused difficulties when teachers were attempting to integrate children of offenders, as it was ever-present like 'a little sign over their heads'.

Carol asserted that family history influenced a family's outlook on imprisonment. For example, she said of her son: 'he was the first member of my family to go to prison... so it was actually a big thing in my family... [If my siblings] were to ask [me] about him, they'd whisper his name'. Also in relation to family history, several spoke about intergenerational trends in families or about history repeating itself, with three participants referring to 'vicious circle[s]' involving up to three generations of particular families. As Monica put it: 'a lot of kids that I would have seen visiting the prison back then, visiting their fathers – they're all in there themselves now, a lot of them' and Thelma described these trends as endemic in particular families (and areas). Sarah, who felt that some form of action needed to be taken in order to break this cycle, stated, 'So the circle never breaks and it *never* ends [original emphasis]'.

In relation to the specific experience of having a father in prison, some participants' interpretations were similar to those of children. For example, a number of participants talked about how the experience of having a father in prison appeared to have the effect of normalising prison. Thelma explained, 'I think it removes the whole shame that we have about it' and Finbar stated that it was 'no big deal' because, as he put it, 'I sees [sic] them most times... when I'm out'.

Having said this, a few participants said that paternal incarceration was an event that had the effect of marginalising families of offenders and some family members (including those in fathers' extended families) felt that incarceration had brought shame on them. For example, Carol (the mother of an offender) recalled her other son, who 'worked hard... got a good education and... made something of himself', telling her how 'mortified' (ie, ashamed) he was that his brother had let the family down. She claimed she had got into fights with him over such comments, telling him, 'He's your brother no matter what', though the non-criminal son was not persuaded to be so forgiving. For this reason, some parents and carers reported attempting to keep incarceration a secret. For instance, Carol recalled having 'nearly ripped the arm out' of her grandson in an attempt to pull him away before he could finish telling her work colleague that he was asking Santa Claus for a helicopter and a rope to get his father out of prison. She stated: 'you wouldn't talk to people like that about it'. The issue of secrecy is discussed further in the next chapter.

Monica agreed with her daughter's comparison between paternal incarceration and a father's death: 'It actually is a bereavement... when someone goes to prison; it actually is'. She described how the Rainbows Programme was approaching the situation with her child: 'Just because he's not dead, he's still away and you [are] still grieving for him and you still want to be with him'.

Three teachers considered the fact that paternal incarceration often resulted in the loss of a child's only male role model to be a significant aspect of the experience. Tara claimed that the children whom she had encountered whose fathers were in prison appeared to 'really miss having male role model[s] around'. Teachers talked about children, but boys in particular, having 'no-one to look up to', nobody with whom they could identify and no male figures in positions of authority. They suggested that the latter was especially crucial for boys as they grew older or moved up towards the senior end of the primary cycle because 'boys... don't rate women after a certain age... mammy's not going to do anything' (Thelma). Two of these teachers spoke about primary schools being 'very feminised places' (Thelma), with very few (if any) male teachers and Tara stated that children with fathers in prison were the kind of kids who loved the school caretaker in school and would gravitate towards such male figures in an apparent attempt to fill a certain void. Although most referred to the significance of this for boys, Tara worried about the kind of man one girl (who had no other male role model at home) would seek out or what she might look for in a future partner, given that she might consider imprisonment of males to be normal.

Interestingly, Tara compared the experience of paternal incarceration to that of having a learning difficulty such as dyslexia. She was convinced that it was better for a child to know about a father's imprisonment and considered it crucial that parents were honest with children.

If a child has... dyslexia and you tell them: 'This is the reason why you think like this'... it might be hard at the start, but then... [they think], 'Oh yeah, that makes sense... this is why this is happening... Now it makes sense' and then they're not... worrying and wondering about it all the time.

Finally, participants such as Teresa said that they considered families of imprisoned men to be serving their own 'life sentence' and Stacey spoke, in particular, about the effect that fear of retaliation for fathers' crimes can have on families:

there was [sic] fears that there would be... retaliations on the family and this was the big thing. So, therefore, they lived in a lovely house but the house was behind big high walls and electronic gates and CCTVs... so who was in prison? Was it the father or the children and the wife? And it was the family; [they were] the victims. They were really [the ones] in prison.

In a small number of cases, participants spoke about paternal incarceration being perceived as a positive thing, in that, it provided mothers with opportunities for their lives to be a little less chaotic. This is discussed further in Chapter Eight.

7.4 Change of carer (and loss of other family members)

Five of the 21 participants in this research reported that the child/children in their care had experienced a change of primary carer. Ten reported no change of carer and six (teachers and professionals) either were not sure or did not comment on this. Fintan's family was taken into care for a few months, before being fostered by a family member. Fintan claimed that their new carer was stricter than their mother had been and explained that she may have been a little too lenient when the children first came to live with her before realising she had to be a little tougher. In addition to his own imprisonment, he thought that being fostered caused his son to feel different as he started in a new school because the children in the new area knew he was fostered. Carol assumed responsibility for her five grandchildren when the children's mother 'moved off' with a new partner, following their father's imprisonment. She reported that the upheaval caused by moving home and experiencing a change of carer was 'massive'. She spoke about the difficulties some of the children had getting used to new rules/limits:

They had to be in [the house] at nine o'clock and they were saying,... 'I don't care'... you'd have to go looking for them. I was their worst nightmare.

While she claimed they 'loved the lunches and the clean clothes and the showers', they would say things like 'Oh, I hate living with Nana' because, under her care, they did not have the same level of freedom as before. On the other hand, Carol said that

one of her grandchildren felt differently. At the age of about ten or 11, he appeared to crave stability. As she explained, 'he wanted a routine':

[At] half nine at night, he had... toast and chocolate spread. That was every night at half nine. Everything was like as if he was in the army. He never had that you see... He was there... You wouldn't even have to look at the clock... He loved the routine.... He embraced it. He said it to me one day, 'Nana, I always wanted to live with you'... But I think it's just that he was stable. He was able to come in and there was someone there and there was no shouting and no fighting.

Carol said that, prior to his being in her care, this boy would have been left in charge when his mother (and, possibly, father, before his imprisonment) went out at night. It would appear that a change of carer also resulted in reduced responsibility for this boy.

Because he would've been the eldest and if they were going off or fighting or doing anything, he would probably have to mind all them. So maybe that responsibility was gone from him and he could become the child... his routine was 'I'm a little boy... I get my chocolate [spread] and I go up to bed and I don't have to worry about no-one [sic]'.

Similar to the 'empty promises' of which Tara spoke,⁵⁹ Carol believed that her grandchildren had regularly been disappointed by their parents' inability to stand by their commitments and that the stability she had provided was important to them: 'If I said I'd do it, I'd do it and they needed that in their life [sic]... – [to have] one steady person... [to] be there for them'. Sally and Sarah referred to one boy who had been living with his father (who had been his main carer) and his step-family. When his father committed a crime that saw him ending up in prison, he was forced to return to his mother's care, essentially losing his whole family - his dad, his step-mum and his step-brothers and -sisters. Sarah pointed out that, as a result of his father's imprisonment, he lost everything over the course of one night. And Teresa explained that the consequence of another father's arrest was that his children were also taken into care, though only temporarily, before being returned to their mother.

⁵⁹ Tara claimed that one boy had repeatedly been told by his father that he would call him from prison, but never called on the days he was meant to have called. Similarly, the boy's grandparents on his father's side had constantly promised to bring him to visit his father in prison, but that had not happened, either.

7.5 Change of home

Eight of the 21 participants interviewed stated that the child/children in their care had moved around the time of the father's incarceration. Four reported no move and nine made no reference to a change in living situation. As detailed above in section 7.4 – *Change of carer*, two families were taken into state care temporarily after their fathers' imprisonment. One family returned to its original home, only to move a little while later (reportedly as a result of the crime that had been committed there). Teresa, a teacher in the children's school, referred to the apprehension felt by the 'distinctive' family's new neighbours in anticipation of its arrival in the area, as they wondered what would ensue. She said, 'Both sides were waiting to see what the other side was going to do. It was very hard'. Teresa claimed she could sense the children's uneasiness at that time and attributed their uneasiness to concerns they might have had about what people in the new neighbourhood would say about them. The other family (ie, Fintan's) was rehomed/fostered with a family member. Fintan felt that not being in his own surroundings might have been difficult for his youngest son, particularly because of the fact that the area in which the new carer lived differed from that in which the boy had grown up; his new home was in 'a good part of the city'. Fintan spoke of his son's loss of sense of belonging as a result of the move: 'He wouldn't feel exactly as if it's his own home'.

Flynn's family had to move house (to entirely different parts of the country) three times, eventually returning to the area in which they were first based. Flynn thought that his children got 'used to... choppin' an' changin'' home. When her son was ready to start primary school, Melissa decided to move to the country so that he could attend a rural school: 'I did make the decision for [Name of boy] to go to school out in the country because I didn't want him to be in with Joe Soap's son that knows [Name of father in prison] or was in jail with [Name of father in prison]'. She feared that the link would come up in conversation in class:

'Oh, my daddy was in jail with your daddy'. I didn't want that... I wanted to shield him from it for as long as I possibly could. That's why I wanted him to go to school out in [Name of village]. That's why I moved out of town.

And Melanie's family was forced to move to hotel accommodation approximately three months after a father's prison sentence started due to a shortage of public housing. Melanie hoped they would be rehoused before his release. Her daughter did not like living in a hotel and constantly questioned her mother: 'When are we getting a house, ma?'. Melanie's partner had told his daughter that he was working and that when they got a house he would come home. As a result, it would appear that this little girl considered the new living arrangements to be connected to her father's absence/imprisonment and viewed both as issues that would be resolved simultaneously, as she excitedly told her father on the phone: 'Daddy, when you get out... I'm getting a house and a Frozen bed'!⁶⁰ The upheaval associated with living in a hotel, along with the childcare arrangements resulting from the father's imprisonment meant that the girl's school bag sometimes ended up being left at her grandmother's house. During her interview, Melanie remembered that she had not been given a new book to read in some time and said that it was 'prob'ly over her not having the bag' and, thus, not being able to return the previous book. Finally, Fred's son, who had previously lived with his father and his new partner and baby, was forced to move back in with his mother and sister (who had also stayed at her father's house at weekends). According to Fred, he was not pleased.

7.6 Change of school

The vast majority of children discussed in this research did not experience a change of school. Just two of the 21 participants spoke of children attending more than one school (and only one of these changes was as a result of the father's imprisonment), indicating that, in these instances at least, school was a constant. In one of the cases in which children moved school, Flynn's children attended three different schools, having moved three times and, eventually, returned to the school that they were 'most comfortable in... and really did enjoy'. Having said this, Flynn was impressed by what he had heard about one of the slightly more rural schools his children had attended. He said of the schools in that place: 'they're on top of it... They're not dealing with as much [sic] kids as bleedin' ... [Name of city suburb]... They entice the kids with instruments and music classes or sports'. He was impressed by the level

⁶⁰ A reference to bed linen featuring characters from a then popular children's film.

of interest one of his children, in particular, took in music while attending the other school. Flynn believed that schools in the suburbs of the city in which he lived had 'a lot of wild kids' in attendance. Based on what he had been told by his partner, he thought that the other school had a lot to offer. In the other case, being fostered by a family member resulted in Fintan's son moving to a school that was closer to his new home. Fintan thought that moving school contributed to his son feeling different (or alienated). Speaking of a family who had moved house, Teresa thought the children were fortunate to have remained in the same school, even though they moved house. She said that this allowed them to 'hang onto the link'.

7.7 Parental bereavement

One mother, Fintan's former partner, reportedly could not cope after his imprisonment. Her children were taken into care and, despite her best efforts, she failed to have them returned home to her. According to Fintan, she had 'actually lost everything' and ended up committing suicide just a few months after his sentence commenced. As previously discussed, Fintan's son considered his father's imprisonment to have been (indirectly, but very much) responsible for her death and had not spoken to his father since her passing. Fintan, like his son, blamed himself: 'that would be down to me coming to prison... [At] the end of the day, it all boils down to that'. Tara spoke about another child whose father passed away in prison.

7.8 Parental separation

Of the 10 parents interviewed, three of the (six) fathers had separated from the mothers (or some of the mothers) of their children and three of the (four) mothers had separated from their children's fathers (although, in Mary's case, this was a temporary split that ended one month before the incarceration). Three parents were still in relationships with their children's other parent and Fintan's former partner had passed away. Just one mother (Monica) stated outright that her partner's imprisonment was the reason for their separation. She recalled having explained to her children:

I can't do this anymore. My whole life has been going to prisons. I've visit[ed] every prison in Ireland because of your father. I can't do it anymore.

Despite Melissa's new partner having lived with them for a number of years (and his having fathered two children with her), Melissa's son was 'completely devastated' to overhear his father asking her for a divorce over the phone. Melissa was surprised he had taken the news so badly and tried to reason out why this was the case:

He thinks, I suppose, it's going to be a big change and he's not going to see [his father] the way he does now... but... I suppose, when he sees that things are... just going to stay the same, he'll be okay... [Previously] he'd never question me, like, 'Are you and daddy still married? Are you and daddy still together?' Just, kind of, he presumed and thinks, because you're married, that's it... I suppose a child's mind... he just thought that, when [his father] gets out, that's it - we'll all be living together.

Melissa thought that his perceptions of married parents (living together) had definitely been influenced by what he had heard at school about other parents. Perhaps predictably so, Thelma said that in her experience mothers' portrayals of fathers and/or their incarceration tended to be more negative after nasty separations. In some cases, parents had started new relationships after separating. For example, Tara described a very positive case in which a mother's new partner treated her daughter 'as [he would] his own daughter' and, as a result, Tara considered the girl to have had a very positive experience of family life following her father's imprisonment. Carol's grandchildren had an entirely different experience when their mother met a new partner after their father's imprisonment, as is discussed in section 8.2.1.2 – *Poor maternal coping skills* in Chapter Eight, below.

7.9 Witnessing fathers' crimes/arrest

Five participants referred to cases known to them of children witnessing or being in the vicinity of illegal activity, including being in houses when murders were being committed. While most of these illegal acts were the crimes that resulted in fathers' incarcerations, they included some instances of domestic violence. Stacey spoke of two children who had witnessed terrible crimes. She said one of these boys (an eight-year-old) always favoured violent games and described the 'horrific' pictures she had seen him draw after he had witnessed his father murder somebody: 'he had daggers and all stuck through hearts'. She believed that the boy was drawing these pictures in order to release some of the emotions he was experiencing after the

event. On the other hand, two fathers in particular (who had been imprisoned for drug-related offences) were keen to point out that their children had never witnessed their drug abuse. As Flynn put it, 'they never seen [sic] anything'.

Just one participant (Stacey) mentioned children witnessing the arrest of their father. She explained that the children in one family, who were believed to have been asleep in bed during the raid, had actually been sitting at the top of the stairs listening to every word. Having heard their word-for-word accounts of the event, she considered this to have been an added trauma with which they had to contend.

7.10 Visiting prisons

7.10.1 Overview

Of the 19 participants who referred to prison visits, 17 said that children visited or had visited fathers regularly and only two referred to children who had never visited a prison. The average frequency of visits appeared to be once a month. Among the 17 participants who spoke of children having visited fathers, two reported that children had visited prisons with their mothers prior to their parents' separation, but had not continued to do so afterwards. Teresa, referring to one of these families, stated that the discontinuation of visits appeared to have had a considerable impact on the older children in particular: 'It's hard to know on the younger ones but the older children are heartbroken, absolutely heartbroken'. She explained that the children's mother had made progress with her life and was not prepared to continue bringing them on visits but claimed that, in her opinion, the children needed that contact with their father, adding that they had said to teachers that they were not going to be visiting their father anymore but that they wanted to see him.

Monica explained that a social worker offered to bring her children to visit their father, but he declined, wanting only Monica to bring them (which she did not). When their eldest child grew old enough to accompany her sibling, he asked them to visit again, but the older girl told him that they had become accustomed to not visiting and stated, 'I'm not visitin' no prison... I don't have ta'. In addition, two fathers in an open prison qualified for temporary release, but the partner of one, Mary, had decided to cease home visits because she thought it was unfair on their

children, as the father's repeated release/re-confinement had, expressed colloquially, been 'wreckin' their heads'. Mary explained that her daughter, who had been very upset when her father was first imprisoned, had gradually improved over time, but that the daily bouts of crying started again before her father's (temporary) release for Christmas, at the thought of him returning to prison afterwards, a prospect that was said to be 'killing her'. Monica explained that her partner, despite being allowed to return home for his daughter's Communion, had not wanted to leave the security of the drug-free facility and get 'caught up in the drugs thing' again and so the family was forced to go to see him the following week, stay in unpleasant accommodation, dress the little girl in her Communion clothes and re-enact her Catholic First Communion for his benefit.

7.10.2 Positive perceptions of prison visits

Surprisingly, for some, visiting a prison was a pleasant (or not altogether unpleasant) experience. For example, mothers/carers spoke about children bringing packed lunches, bringing their Father's Day cards, playing with toys in the hospitality suite,⁶¹ having nice conversations with their fathers and going to McDonald's before or after the visit. Carol stated that she had tried to make things as normal as possible for the children's sakes and went so far as to bring little guitars and other props to the prison one year so that they could perform their 'own little Christmas play for their dad' who was in the Training Unit (a semi-open facility that offered more relaxed visits than a conventional prison). Having completed a twelve-week-long "detox" programme in order to qualify for a place in the Training Unit, the Unit's inmates also had a certificate presentation ceremony that their families could attend. Carol said that it was lovely for the children to see their father achieving something and that they enjoyed the party that followed. Visits in open prisons were considered more satisfactory than in regular prisons. Speaking of one particular family, Stacey explained that the facilities in one open prison allowed a father who was interested in cooking to have meals ready for his family 'so it made it more of a family time and they loved it and treasured that'.

⁶¹ The hospitality suite is the visitors' area of the prison.

7.10.3 Negative perceptions of prison visits

On the other hand, the various difficulties surrounding prison visits were more commonly reported. Firstly, visiting prisons was considered by many to be a challenge or simply 'extra hardship' (Teresa). Making the round trip to prisons often entailed multiple bus or train journeys and Mary claimed the return journey lasted from 'five in the morning 'till two at night', a very long day for small children. She stated that she could not bring two of her children to visit their father as they were prone to travel sickness and the prison was a considerable distance away. Four participants spoke about the financial aspect of visiting prisons, noting that train/bus fares, meals and other costs could amount to anything between €50 and €300. Teresa explained that a mother went to 'endless, endless trouble' trying to make more frugal travel plans. Not having a car herself, she organised for her friends to drive the family to and from the prison at their convenience, paying them a little extra on top of the cost of fuel. Nevertheless, Teresa pointed out that she had €50 or €60 less to spend on those weeks and claimed that she noticed 'the pressure [of that pressing]... downwards onto the children – "That means we've no money for this or we've no money for that" '. Mary stopped bringing her children to visit their father in the months before Christmas due to the fact that she needed to buy Christmas presents, food, etc.

7.10.4 Prison visits as confusing, especially for younger children

There was evidence that younger children (especially if they were unsure why they were in a prison) found visits more upsetting than older or more informed children. For example, Sarah explained that one child was under the impression that his father was coming home with him and his mother when they visited and the realisation that this was not the case caused considerable upset: 'he came out in absolute floods [of tears]'. Similarly, Melanie's daughter who knew the visit was just that (simply a visit) began to think plans had changed when her father was allowed to walk them down the corridor as they were leaving. Melanie recalled her reaction: '[She] got all excited saying, "He's coming back with us" She was laughing and she was clapping her hands, saying to her little brother, "He's coming home now" ', adding that it 'killed' her and her partner to tell the children that this was not the case.

Monica's daughter who had repeatedly been in hospital for invasive medical procedures thought, on seeing people in uniforms performing searches, that she was going to have to endure more poking and prodding and pleaded with her mother, 'Don't let anyone put anything to my bum'.

7.10.5 Prison visits as upsetting

Visits overall were considered a very emotional experience, and difficult, for children and participants spoke of children, even one who was tough enough to have 'frightened the shit out' of Sarah at the age of five and was then 13, being 'reduced to tears' during visits. Sarah also remembered the sight of a particular boy 'all dressed up in his Communion clothes... very, very, very upset'.⁶² She said that children often acted out in the hospitality suite: 'biscuits are thrown down the toilet, they're throwing toilet roll down the toilet, they'll come out along with the toilet roll, swinging it around the whole place' and mothers/carers were often shocked, saying things like, 'I can't get over the way they're acting; they never act like that'. Sarah believed that the out-of-character behaviour was a child's way of letting the mothers know they did not want to be there. Carol noticed a distinct difference in her children's mood on the journey to the prison, in contrast to their mood on the homeward journey: 'They're all hyper going up... but coming home they were totally different'. Melissa, who commented on her son's random bouts of sadness regarding his father's imprisonment, said that it did not happen straight after visits but that she could not eliminate the possibility of this being the triggering factor: 'he seems to be fine after a visit but... things could play on [the boy]'s mind'. Frank and his wife decided after a number of chaotic visits, during which each child was trying to be heard above another, that it was best if just one of their children accompany his/her mother on each visit. Frank felt that, as a result, his children now considered their visit as a kind of special time with him: 'They have a half hour to tell me what they want to tell'.

⁶² This boy's distress might be considered to have been amplified by the fact that his father had been imprisoned just the day before and the boy was distraught that his father was 'in that big grey building' instead of celebrating the special occasion with him.

7.10.6 Prison security screening

Security screening was generally considered an ordeal and searches – whether by metal detector, canine units or frisking - appeared to be quite a daunting prospect for children. Participants spoke of three children being afraid of the dogs that are often used in prison searches. Stacey said that the child in her care told her he simply did not ‘feel good’ about the searches involving the dogs, while Tara relayed the story of a boy in her school who was unwilling to visit his dad after his experience with a sniffer dog.

He was in to see his dad last year and... the sniffer dog was around... Now, to meet him in the yard, he's [a] tough cookie. He's well-able to hold his own but that really troubled him, really, really troubled him... I wouldn't say traumatised him but... it really stuck with him... and [he] has... a fear of dogs after it... just that image I suppose.... Now [he] doesn't want to go back to see his dad. [He] doesn't want to have anything to do with [the prison] now.

She also said that his behaviour, both at home and at school, had changed after that. The boy was quieter in school, apparently quite anxious and not sleeping at home.

7.10.7 Keeping children away from prisons

Of the six parents interviewed who were separated, the children of four continued to visit their fathers as normal (sometimes accompanied by social workers instead of mothers). Fergal said he had not seen his daughter in a very long time and claimed that this was because his ex-partner would not let their daughter visit a prison, despite the girl's desire to do so. But he added: ‘to be honest I don't want her coming’. In addition to Fergal, three other participants said they either did not want their children visiting prisons at all or did not have their children to visit much because they believed that prisons were not child-friendly and that it was best to keep them out of such an adult environment. Monica even admitted trying to sneak off to the prison so that she did not have to bring her daughter. Indeed, Sarah had very strong opinions on the idea of children visiting prisons on a regular basis. Reflecting on her experience, she (along with Thelma) firmly believed that frequent visits to prisons resulted in imprisonment being normalised and served to transmit the message that when children grew older it was acceptable for them to go to prison. She insisted, ‘It *does* happen [original emphasis]’. Having said this, frequent

visits might have the opposite effect on children's perceptions of prison, as was the case with Monica's daughter who, after many years of being 'dragged' to prisons to visit her father, ended her relationship with a boy because he had been incarcerated; she did not wish to spend any more time visiting prisons.

However, one father was determined that his son would visit him and the boy went on to confide in his teacher about a phone conversation to that effect which he had overheard. Tracy recalled what the boy told her: 'he said the phone was on loudspeaker and he heard his dad tell his mum that he's going to take her to court if she doesn't let [the child concerned] go to visit him'. His mother was adamant that the child would not visit a prison. Tracy described this as another significant worry for him, noting he struggled with it until he came up with a solution, which was to tell his father that he did not wish to visit him in prison, a move that would take the blame off his mother.

7.10.8 Children missing school to visit prisons

Finally, visits can be seen as troublesome with regard to children having to take time off school to suit prison visiting times. There were reports of at least four children who attempted to hide the fact that they were leaving or missing school to visit a prison from their teachers or peers. For example, Tara explained that one girl would excuse herself and pretend she was leaving class to go to the toilet so that her peers would not realise where she was going. One boy told Stacey that he was afraid his teachers would find out or infer that he was leaving school to go to see his father, stating that he was 'really scared of that'. Another was reported routinely to look over her shoulder as she left the school building to ensure she was not being followed by anyone from school. For these children, leaving school was a trauma in itself. Others, for whom the distance to travel was longer, needed to take an entire day off school. In such cases and on such days, despite the incarceration of fathers tending to be common knowledge in the area in which she taught, Thelma pointed out that mothers were generally reluctant to let school staff know they were visiting prisons when their children should have been at school (presumably in case the school reported the absences to the Child and Family Agency) and this was evident in children's vague responses to questions posed about absences.

7.11 Children's emotional and behavioural reactions to their experiences

Having explored the experiences of children whose fathers were incarcerated, one might agree with teachers' opinions that some of these children can be accustomed to quite challenging, or as Tara put it, 'chaotic' or 'messy' home situations. Tara also pointed out how difficult it was to isolate the effects of paternal imprisonment because there was so much else 'going on *around* it [original emphasis]' and 'a million and one other reasons' why children might be affected emotionally and/or exhibit worrying behaviour. It seems appropriate at this point to take a brief look at participants' accounts of children's emotional or behavioural reactions to these experiences.

7.11.1 Overview

As Tom pointed out, it is difficult to state with any certainty if a child's uncharacteristic behaviour – whether positive or negative – was caused by father's imprisonment. Nevertheless, over half of interviewees considered children's behaviour at home or at school to have changed discernibly following the incarceration of fathers. And most were in agreement that what Teresa termed the 'huge emotional fallout' resulting from fathers' incarceration was of paramount importance in this regard.

While parents' accounts of behavioural changes in children tended to focus on externalising behaviour (and were usually discussed alongside the issue of discipline), it was clear from teachers' and professionals' accounts that children's reactions to their circumstances could manifest themselves in a variety of ways. Stacey described the behavioural manifestations of children's emotional states as masks, in that, children hid their feelings behind certain types of behaviour. For example, some children wore 'withdrawn' masks, such as the girl who, following her father's imprisonment, gradually became more introverted until she was hardly capable of communicating with others.

Others wore anxious masks, like the boy Stacey described, who

was afraid of the dark... [and] afraid if there was a knock on the door. If he heard a noise in the middle of the night, he had to sleep... [with his mother]. He couldn't go out on his own... He was afraid to have lights on [or] lights off... If there was a slit in the curtains, he was nearly pulling them off [the pole in order] to get them joined together... He was complete anxiety.

Still others wore angry or aggressive masks. For example, Thelma who had taught 27 boys whose fathers had been incarcerated, said:

All of the boys that I have taught who've had a father in prison - it has affected them emotionally. It has altered their perception [sic] of the world. They will always show increased anger.... All of them would have... emotional behavioural issues... Definitely the 27 were all diagnosed with some sort of EBD [Emotional Behavioural Disorder], either as a primary diagnosis or as a comorbidity with something else... They would display aggression... They would often be very tearful in private... A lot of their aggression would be to cover sadness.

Finally, Tess simply described one boy as blank and noted the difficulty this posed as she tried to ascertain if he was upset or if his father's incarceration was affecting him in any way.

7.11.2 Processing and/or releasing emotions

Some participants spoke about the difficulty children had with emotions, referring to children's hurt 'coming out as anger' or uncharacteristic behaviour being caused by the hurt and sadness 'fester' inside these children (Thelma & Stacey, respectively). For example, speaking about one particular boy, Stacey said, 'There couldn't be any more bad behaviour than what he had and still his heart was breaking inside'. Teachers claimed that many children did not know how to process their emotions or, quite simply, how to cope with missing somebody and challenging behaviour was generally seen as a result of such deficiencies. Indeed, some participants claimed that children were unsure how to talk about things or express themselves and tended to lash out when they grew angry or frustrated. As Fintan said of his son, 'he's expressing himself the wrong way'. A number of participants referred to children being unwilling to speak about their feelings. For example, Melissa's son was said to 'brush things off' and Carol claimed her granddaughter

would laugh at her and claim she was mad if she asked her to discuss her emotions. Carol stated that her granddaughter had ‘toughen[ed]... up’ during her father’s prison sentence and pretended nothing (not even her father’s incarceration) bothered her, to the point that she had almost ‘fooled’ herself into believing her pretence. The charade appeared to be her coping strategy but other children used others. For example, in order to deal with the loss of her father, Carol’s other granddaughter completely dissociated and created a magical, dream-like fantasy in her head, in which her father was the prince and she was the princess and she would look out the window and wait for her father, who she believed was going to come back. Meanwhile, her brother (described as a ‘softie’) would go outside and kick a football against a wall for hours without stopping and Carol said that he seemed to be in better form on his return. Tracy pointed out that some children, like the boy in her class, simply needed time to process what had happened. Children’s externalising behaviour at home is discussed in the next chapter in section 8.2 – *Children’s relationships and interactions with mothers/carers*. What follows is a brief description of the kinds of behaviour exhibited by children of incarcerated fathers in schools.

7.11.3 Children’s behaviour at school

Children’s behaviour in school varied greatly. Eight participants reported cases of challenging or aggressive behaviour, described variously as ‘kicking off’, ‘acting out’, ‘running amok’, ‘lashing out’ and the like. Specific instances of inappropriate behaviour included a four-year-old kicking and exposing herself to her teacher (and explaining that ‘her body told her to do it’), a five-year-old flooding a school toilet and a six-year-old pulling pictures off the classroom walls and turning tables and chairs upside-down. Some were said to have threatened teachers and Stacey described one boy as a ‘teachers’ hell’. At the other extreme, four participants referred to cases of children being withdrawn, ‘guarded’ or prone to crying for no discernible reason. For example, Stacey explained that one particular child was:

an angel in school for the teacher because she would always be so introverted that she never gave trouble. She never said ‘Boo’. She never joined in the class.... but underneath she was festering with anger and resentment and bitterness.

Three participants reported cases of children being 'not too bold' or not getting into trouble 'a huge amount', although one of these was said to have been quite lazy and to have a lack of respect for authority. And four participants referred to cases of children having no problems or no discipline issues insofar as behaviour in school was concerned. For example, Frank said his children were praised highly at parent-teacher meetings and Melissa, who 'never had a day's trouble' with regard to her son's behaviour in school, stated that the only (slightly) negative thing she had been told by teachers was that her son did not like to stand up and participate in class discussions. Two mothers were not sure how their children behaved in school.

In many of these cases however, there were variations at times. For example, one boy in Tom's school, who was described as disruptive and demanding of teachers' attention in a whole-class setting, was said to be well-behaved in a one-to-one setting. Interestingly, four of the six teachers reported that mothers had informed them of problems with children at home following their fathers' imprisonment when there no were such issues evident at school. By way of explanation, Tara felt that children's behaviour can sometimes remain the same at school because school is a constant aspect of these children's lives, whereas their home lives had changed or were changing considerably. Fergal's observation of one boy, whose initial distress seemed to ease off as he settled into the routine of each school day, might offer support for this theory. Thelma pointed out that, while there would definitely be an increase in challenging behaviours when a father is first sent to prison, children's behaviour can sometimes plateau and even improve after some time has passed.

SECTION TWO

The first section in this chapter explored the experiences of children with fathers in prison and interpretations of these experiences. This section examines the implications of these experiences and interpretations with regard to children's attitudes to school and learning, their approaches to schoolwork and their academic performance. Each of these topics is explored below.

7.12 Attitudes to school and learning

A little over half the participants in this research referred to children's positive attitudes to school and learning. Six of the 11 parents (four fathers and two mothers/carers) interviewed stated that their children liked or loved school, with Mary explaining that her daughter was reluctant to stay at home, even when sick. Parents reported that, for some children, the social element was the most attractive feature of school. Flynn explained that it was a more engaging option than the alternative (ie, remaining at home):

They actually enjoy school because, other than that... where we're all living... it's apartments... and there's no other... kids [sic], there's nowhere for them to play so, when they go to school they're meeting friends and they're doing their thing.... They actually do enjoy it because other than that... I'd have to bring them somewhere and I'm not there... they're left sitting around playing their PlayStation [electronic games].

Fergal spoke of his son's excitement about starting 'big school' for the first time, saying: 'he actually can't wait'. He explained that his son considered starting primary school a step into adulthood and an opportunity to emulate his grandfather, who had brought a packed lunch to work for the previous 43 years: 'That's what [Name of boy] wants; he wants a packed lunch going to school every day... because he's a big boy now'. Frank described his children as being interested in learning both in and outside school; they loved reading books and he said his son was particularly inquisitive and liked to ask questions, even when visiting the prison: 'The first time [he visited], before I even got to talk to him, he sees the sign... about... "any prohibited articles" and he wanted to know, "What's prohibited?" '.

Four teachers thought that children considered school a pleasant, stable or safe place to be, with two referring to DEIS schools providing essentials such as food, uniforms and books. For example, Teresa described her school as warm, bright and welcoming and Thelma illustrated the influence a mother's ability to cope after a father's incarceration can have on children's perceptions of school, as she spoke about one home in which:

Mammy was an alcoholic. She couldn't get herself out of bed, let alone get two kids out of bed. But they [the children] used to come in every day and I think it was because school was the safest place and they knew they'd get their lunch... we'd have the free lunches and the free buns... For some kids, when daddy goes into prison, mammy falls apart so school's the safest place for them.

Aside from the essentials schools set out to provide, it would appear that some children saw school as a place from which they could procure additional items; Thelma told of how one particular child would steal socks (that she used to clean whiteboards) from her classroom:

he would take a pair every Monday for four years until he left the school. And he'd never ask me for them and he'd never take new ones; I would put new ones in all the time. He'd never take new ones; he'd take the ones that were a bit manky, that were a bit washed and he'd take two.

When considering children's general attitudes to school and learning, two teachers simply referred to children's affinities for particular subjects and Tom stated that the boy in his class 'didn't have issues about coming into school or anything like that'.

Barry (whose teachers and friends were apparently unaware of his father's imprisonment) wrote down his opinions of school and learning, which one could only describe as mixed. On the one hand, he spoke about being interested in learning and, presumably referring to the upheaval at home, described school as a place to which he could escape and 'block it [all] out'. On the other hand, he lived in constant fear of the topic being raised or of people finding out about his father and what might happen as a result of that. As he put it: 'it's hard not to be able to tell anyone... It's very scary for me for [sic] someone to know'. (These fears are discussed in Chapter Eight in relation to children's relationships and interactions with teachers and

peers). Barry also appeared to have exaggerated notions of what might happen were he to get into trouble at school. As his therapist, Stacey, explained:

[He would] never give trouble in school but still is living in fear that he's going to give trouble or get into trouble... The teacher might say 'Well that's not neat homework'; that's trouble to him... or, if a kid hits him and he lost his temper and he hit him back, which he... wouldn't do, he'd be afraid he'd go to prison... He's even afraid... at times to ask to go to the toilet in case he meets somebody outside, somebody says something and he gets blamed... they could... accuse him of saying something. The paranoia is complete child paranoia.

Three parents (Fred, Melissa and Carol) referred to their children disliking or even hating school. Fred's son did not want to go to school at all but Fred explained that the boy's mother finally managed to get him settled and went on to speak about his being introduced to a new hobby in school. Melissa considered her 'sports-mad' son to be 'like any normal little boy; he hates going to school... and he hates homework', but pointed out that neither she nor her son's teachers had ever had any problems with her son in relation to school. Carol stated that her grandchild never wanted to be in school. Some parents referred to their own childhood attitudes to school, with the majority of these references being somewhat (or entirely) negative.

Teresa said she did not notice a significant change in children's overall interest in school following their father's imprisonment, while Tess spoke of a boy's indifference insofar as school, homework and teachers were concerned: 'he just didn't care'. She referred to his overall disposition as blank: 'he doesn't get particularly angry, [he] doesn't get sad... I've never seen him cry'. Although she was careful to point out that he did not sit expressionless at his desk and would laugh with his friends, Tess explained that he was never 'overly enthusiastic or positive', that it was very difficult to get him excited and that she found it difficult to find rewards that would motivate him in class. Tess did not know if he had been of a similar disposition prior to his father's imprisonment, but noted that this attitude was accompanied by a slight lack of respect for authority.

Some teachers referred to children's negative attitudes to education more generally. For example, Thelma recalled one boy's attitude to education as he contemplated what he considered to be his inevitable future:

I always remember one boy - very intelligent but huge, huge problems - problems with authority, problems with everybody. But he said one day, 'I don't want my future, my past, to be like an ice-slide'. That's what he compared it to. And he said, 'I'm standing on the ice-slide and I know I'm going to fall. I'm going to slip down it and that's it. I don't have any other idea'. He said, 'And you're sitting here talking to me about "Oh you could be anything. You could be an engineer. You're really good with Lego [building bricks]"... But there's no point in being really good with Lego and no point in being really good with my hands because... my dad's in prison and my uncles are in prison and my cousin got out the other day and that's what I'm going to be... I'm going to be someone who's in prison'.

For some children, school (and education as we generally understand it) seemed an irrelevance. It did not fit their perceptions of their futures. Indeed, Thelma agreed that, for many of the children she had taught in the past, schooling was not exactly pertinent to what became their futures.

We're not really getting them ready for life. We're getting them ready to go to secondary school and to go to college but they're never going to do it. [In the last eleven years] I've taught nobody who's gone to college but I've taught five boys who've murdered someone.

She added that finishing secondary school was, in that area, the exception to the rule. Particularly in areas that experience high rates of crime and imprisonment, education can be seen as a difficult way of making what some children might consider to be a mediocre living and the allure of wealth and an apparent easy life is ever present in the form of a criminal lifestyle. As Thelma explained, this has an influence on how they interpret education:

they don't see education as a way out... Why would you work, like? 'Cause you'd have to pay tax and you lose your house and you lose your book... [They wonder,] 'Is that for me? I don't want to be studying 'till I'm twenty-four. But if I run drugs for someone I'm going to earn a lot of money'.

She went on to say that a lot of the boys in her school had:

Post Office accounts where the gangs would put money in and... they get little... scooters... and they run drugs. And they get maybe €50 a week for that. I mean €50 a week when you're seven or eight... [would] buy a lot of tracksuits... So... they're running drugs at seven and eight.

She spoke about the role the media played in influencing children's perceptions of success and how this had an impact on their attitudes to school:

they're looking at rappers and they're looking at lads going, 'I want [a] big dollar sign in gold encrusted with diamonds around my neck and I'm not going to get that if I go working like these nee-aws [ie, idiots, but perhaps specifically implying law-abiding people]'.

Thelma thought that these children's perceptions of success were skewed, in that, many of them saw the monetary value of a person's material goods as the principal marker of success and contrasting the apparent wealth of an educated person, such as their teacher, with that of people who had acquired wealth in a more illegal manner did little to promote positive attitudes to education:

They're shocked I've [an old] car and they're always going, 'Aw, jays Miss, you need to change your car' and I'm like, 'I can't afford to change my car and it's grand; I'm not going to change it'. And they're like, 'Oh my God, the shame!'.

This notion of children being impressed by the biggest cars and by other extravagant items purchased with the proceeds of crime was also mentioned by Carol and although these comments might say more about criminality (in certain cultures) and less about imprisonment itself, it is difficult to explain why children might feel their futures inevitably involved imprisonment without considering why this might be so.

7.13 Approaches to schoolwork

7.13.1 Children's overall approaches to schoolwork

One might assume that children's approaches to schoolwork are primarily influenced by their attitudes to school and learning or education more generally. Indeed, with few exceptions, children whose attitudes to school were described as positive appeared to have a more dynamic approach to their schoolwork, while children whose attitudes were seen by participants as negative were likely to have

a more passive approach. For example, participants spoke of the high levels of motivation or eagerness with which children who were said to 'love' school approached their work, while the approaches of children who disliked school were generally referred to as 'lazy' or 'distracted' (Tess and Fred, respectively). That being said, some participants noted overall passive approaches to schoolwork, with anomalous enthusiasm for certain curricular areas such as Science, Physical Education or Music. As Tess put it: 'He'd completely zone out [ie, not pay attention]... except [during] Science'. And sometimes children's approaches were relatively positive but their poor coping skills could cause problems if they encountered any particularly challenging tasks. For example, Tom described one boy who was 'ear-marked [by a previous teacher] as someone who could get incredibly frustrated very quickly' and was said to be 'liable to outbursts' if matters were not going his way or if he was finding it difficult to understand something in an academic sense.

While some participants were unsure if children had been affected by a father's incarceration, others referred to it having noticeable impacts on children's approaches to schoolwork. For example, Tom noticed that the boy in his class, whose contribution to and involvement in class he considered to be quite limited prior to his father's imprisonment, was 'even more disengaged', tired and emotional during his father's sentence. In his written account, Barry claimed that his father's incarceration had not affected him academically because, as he put it, 'I can study... I'm interested in my schoolwork'. However, he was concerned about the effect that other people's knowledge of his father's incarceration might have on his learning: 'If they find out what will happen to me? They won't like me... and will I be able... to learn well?' Teresa and Stacey referred to children who were interested in their schoolwork and keen to do well, but who were apprehensive or guarded in their approach to schoolwork following their fathers' imprisonment. Teresa noted that such approaches were particularly noticeable during SPHE lessons or any other lessons in which the children might be expected to discuss themselves or their feelings. But Carol, who enjoyed the benefit of hindsight, felt that one of her children was so hurt by and got such a shock as a result of his father's imprisonment that it 'put him on the right road' and this led to his completing educational courses and securing gainful employment.

Two participants spoke about children's negative approaches to schoolwork improving after interventions by teachers or principals. For example, Tess spoke about a boy's diminished efforts, but said that improvements were evident immediately after the principal became involved; the boy became much more focused. Similarly, Stacey stated that the effect of one teacher providing additional support to a boy was that the boy started to apply himself more conscientiously to his work. Stacey was of the belief that children such as these (who might be inclined to "opt out") can work well if, firstly, you can gain their trust and, second, interventions are applied in a timely manner. And Tara spoke about seeing the 'bigger picture' and coming to a better understanding of the challenges children face when you visit their homes (which she described as often chaotic). She recalled the moment she realised the level of motivation required for some children to do homework or even make it to school and marvelled that they actually managed to arrive at school each morning and produce some sort of homework.

7.13.2 Expectations regarding or ambitions for the future influencing approaches

Perceptions of, and aspirations for, the future was an unexpected, but recurring, theme in the research. Already mentioned in relation to children's attitudes to school and learning, it was one that appeared to be inherently linked to children's approaches to schoolwork, as I shall explain in this section. On the one hand, hopes for the future could be quite positive. Stacey recalled a number of children speaking about their determination not to follow in their fathers' footsteps. For example, one girl reportedly said to her: 'I promise you this and I mean it, I will never, ever, ever, do any wrong and go to prison like dad'.

In his written account, Barry, who described himself as interested in his schoolwork, also spoke of his intention to avoid any dealings with the prison system: 'when I'm older I will not get into trouble. I will not go to prison'. Similarly, Ben, prompted to write a few sentences about his hopes for the future, wrote: 'I hope I am as smart as Mom. I hope my future is not like my dad's. I hope I become successful in the future'.

In all cases in which positive approaches to schoolwork were mentioned, participants spoke unprompted about children's futures, mentioning college funds, conversations they had had with children about their futures, advice they had given children or simply the bright futures these children had ahead of them. For example, Finbar said decidedly of his children: 'They're going to go to college', while Flynn recalled telling his children: 'You can be anything you want. It's time to start thinking what you want to be when you grow older because you don't want to be [a] waster⁶³ and... waste your life like your daddy'. Tracy described Ben's zealous approach to schoolwork that appeared to be motivated by distinct goals for the future (eg, to attend university) and an overall desire to do well. Tara expressed her opinion that a mother's resilience is an essential factor that can influence the path a child takes in life, referring specifically to one particularly strong mother with 'a really good head on her shoulders' who supported her child throughout each stage of her education, regardless of her own difficulties: 'I've no doubt that child'll go to college... whereas, I think, if she'd a different mother, it would have been [a] very different outcome'.

On the other hand, in contrast to this were those children who saw themselves as being on an inevitable path that would ultimately lead to imprisonment in the future. As Thelma explained, familial trends usually played a role.

I would have dealt with a lot of families where grandad had been locked up, daddy was locked up, the uncles were locked up, cousins were starting to be locked up. It was this inevitable path [the children] saw themselves being on and, whether they wanted to be on that path or not, [even] if they tried to rail against it, they couldn't see a way out.

She considered there to be a certain acceptance that 'this is the path you're on' and, utilising one boy's metaphor of the ice slide, she said that these children believed they were, 'on an ice slide... going down it and [that] there's no way of stopping that momentum. There's no other way out'. Tara spoke of a child looking at his father and brother in prison and her worries that the boy would see that as his future. In conversations with their parents these children were told things such as, 'You can only do what you can do. I'm not expecting miracles' (Fred). These children's

⁶³ An Irish idiom equivalent to wastrel or scoundrel.

approaches to schoolwork, as with their attitudes to school and learning, were routinely described as negative. Their apparent fatalistic attitudes to life in general usually meant that they saw school as irrelevant and they reportedly approached their schoolwork with a distinct 'absence of ambition... an absence of wanting to do better' (Thelma).

Three participants spoke of their own negative perceptions of children's futures. For example, Thelma said: 'you can nearly tell. It's terrible... [they] get [to] Second Class [and] you're going, "Yeah, I know where you're going" '. She added that, in her experience, family history and children's attitudes were two of the tell-tale elements but that she believed it was the combination of risks these children faced that ultimately sealed their fate: 'it's because of everything'. Stacey described a boy as 'ready for prison or for worse, if he was [still] alive', while Fintan stated regretfully of his son: 'I can see prison in him... I can actually see the way he going [sic]'. In both of these cases, the children in question had poor approaches to schoolwork (accompanied by disruptive behaviour).

Less extreme cases of children with poor approaches to schoolwork involved their having proposed future careers that did not require any great *academic* achievement. For example, Frank described his son's approach to schoolwork as 'a bit wayward', in that, he believed his football skills, coupled with his dream of becoming a professional football player, meant that he did not necessarily need to succeed in an academic sense. Incidentally, Frank had encouraged his son to be realistic and to 'pull his socks up' and make more of an effort (or 'knuckle down') in school, telling him that, even though he was very good, there was no guarantee he was going to forge a career from his football skills alone.

Finally, Stacey spoke about a boy whose approach to schoolwork, along with his behaviour inside and outside school, was 'terrible'. He had been suspended and expelled from school, he carried knives and was in trouble with the authorities – all while still in primary school. When Stacey (his therapist) eventually managed to connect with him, it transpired that he was on a mission and that his only hope for the future was that he would be imprisoned alongside his father, whom he 'idolised'.

He believed that if he killed someone he would achieve his aim. Stacey explained to him that, at his age, he would not be placed in custody in the same institution as his father, to which he reportedly replied, ‘Then it’d be all for nothing... I wouldn’t get to be [with him]’. After this realisation, a gradual transformation started to take place and his behaviour started to improve. A few sessions later, the boy appealed for help from Stacey, reportedly saying: ‘Tell me what I’m to do... Tell me the way I’ve to change’. At the time of data generation, the boy was in secondary school and, with the help of a considerable number of outside resources, was doing very well. Sarah told a similar story about a boy who planned to join his father in prison when he turned 18. Unfortunately, he did not demonstrate a similar transformation insofar as his approach to schoolwork was concerned and Sarah stated her belief that: ‘he *will* end up in prison [original emphasis]’ at some point in the future.

7.14 Academic performance

7.14.1 Overview

Given the varying degrees of contact each group of participants had with children, it seems fitting to discuss findings in relation to academic performance in separate sections, that is, mothers’/carers’ accounts, fathers’ accounts, professionals’ accounts and teachers’ accounts. Of these four groups, it might be fair to say that teachers would have a more precise idea of how children were performing in an academic sense and how their achievements compared to those of their peers.⁶⁴ For this reason, teachers’ accounts of children’s academic performance are discussed first, followed by mothers’/carers’ accounts and fathers’ accounts and, finally, professionals’ accounts. The main topics discussed by participants in relation to children’s academic performance were overall intelligence and academic performance (including standardised test results), concentration/listening skills, homework and attendance. All of these are considered below.

⁶⁴ Longitudinal research has found Irish parents to have higher estimates of their children’s abilities than those of their children’s teachers (Growing Up in Ireland Study Team, 2009).

7.14.2 Teachers' accounts

7.14.2.1 Overall academic performance

Firstly, it is important to note that the vast majority of teachers spoke relatively sparingly about children's academic performance and appeared to have much more to say about children's emotional, social or behavioural reactions to fathers' incarceration. As Thelma put it: 'we would be watching more for behaviour, I'd have to say, than for academics'. Having said this, some teachers' accounts painted very clear pictures of children's academic profiles, although these were not necessarily always positive.

Aside from two references to children having particular strengths, there were just two children (of a possible 47) where academic performance was mentioned in an overall positive light. One of these was mentioned fleetingly by Thelma who had taught 27 children of imprisoned fathers and she claimed that the child in question was intelligent. The boy about whom most detail was given was said to be a very bright boy with considerable potential, who was 'academically well [ie, very] able', possessed good concentration skills and whose homework was consistently of an excellent standard. With regard to his level of achievement, he was described as being 'in the average range, but the higher end of the average range'. According to Tracy (his teacher), his attainment in English was excellent and he was a competent reader. His father had been imprisoned soon after the academic year started and so, at the time of interviewing, Tracy was in a position to discuss his standardised test results (ie, MICRA-T⁶⁵ and SIGMA-T⁶⁶ results) from before and after this event.⁶⁷ In both English (MICRA-T) and Mathematics (SIGMA-T) assessments, this boy's STen scores fell by one STen. That is to say, his English STen, which was seven prior to his father's incarceration, was six afterwards and his Mathematics STen, which was

⁶⁵ The Mary Immaculate College Reading Attainment Test (MICRA-T) is one of the most commonly administered standardised reading/literacy assessments by primary school teachers in Ireland. It identifies children's reading ages and allows teachers to compare their students' attainments in reading (and comprehension of reading) with standards on a national level.

⁶⁶ The Standardised Irish Graded Mathematics Attainment Test (SIGMA-T) is a standardised assessment used by teachers in Irish primary schools to garner information about students' levels of achievement in Mathematics. It allows teachers to compare students' attainments in Mathematics with national standards.

⁶⁷ Both sets of tests had been carried out at the end of the academic year.

eight before his father was taken into custody, was seven afterwards. Tracy was surprised at his results, having expected a higher STen in English in particular and, even though standardised test scores *can* occasionally fluctuate, she stated that the drop in scores probably *was* a result of his father's incarceration and the accompanying upheaval.

Some accounts of children's academic performance had both positive and negative elements. For example, according to Teresa, the children in one family did not appear to experience a dramatic change in their academic performance - 'things probably ticked over... pretty well', but she reported the occasional dip in performance, which she attributed to the children sometimes 'not feeling too good in themselves'. A boy in Tess's class with very poor concentration and listening skills, 'extremely poor' handwriting and a below average level of achievement received extra support in the form of Reading Recovery [hereafter RR], a short-term one-to-one literacy intervention for low-achieving students. Having struggled with literacy previously, the boy made remarkable progress and was dubbed 'possibly the best [RR] candidate' the (dedicated RR) teacher had taught, in that his review indicated a high level of retention. His standardised English assessment (MICRA-T) in the year after his father's imprisonment put his STen at six, which is considered average. Tess explained that he continued to struggle considerably and would need continuing support in Mathematics, but that she believed he would struggle a certain amount *anyway*, that is, regardless of his father's incarceration. Having said this, his Mathematics assessment (SIGMA-T) results were (though admittedly not significantly) lower in the year after his father's incarceration than they were in the year of his initial imprisonment; while he received a STen of four in both Mathematics tests, he was recorded as being in the 25th percentile at the time of the first assessment and in the 19th percentile at the time of the second.

The remaining references to children's academic performance were quite negative. For example, teachers spoke about children being 'very, very weak academically', below average, limited in the contribution they could make to group work in the class and a 'good bit behind' or, usually referring to fine motor skills, not as developed as their peers. For instance, one boy in First Class was said to be unable

to perform at a First Class level, having ‘trouble even... playing with certain things, functionally’ and only a vague notion of what (curricular) subjects were. Thelma, who taught in a disadvantaged area, found it difficult to comment on children’s academic performance following the imprisonment of their fathers because she considered it to be quite common in disadvantaged schools for teachers to notice a decline in academic achievement mid-way through children’s primary school years anyway, regardless of whether or not children’s fathers had been imprisoned. She attributed this to children in such areas experiencing repeated failures academically and eventually becoming so disheartened that they give up (usually at approximately the age of eight or nine years old). And so, while she had observed decreases in children’s levels of academic achievement/performance after fathers were incarcerated, she was unsure if these were caused by the event itself or by all of the other factors at play. As she put it: ‘You can’t definitely say it’s the one thing but it [paternal incarceration] would *definitely* be a contributing factor [original emphasis]’.

7.14.2.2 Homework

Insofar as homework was concerned, there was a general consensus that it was a ‘big problem’ or, at best, ‘hit and miss’. For example, teachers referred to homework being seldom done, rarely done properly, sometimes appalling and, at other times, not the children’s own work. Tess stated that a boy in her class typically did his homework (or had his homework done), but said that he had a negative attitude to it, in that, he did not appear to care about it. She explained that the quality of homework tended to improve temporarily if a note was sent home about it, but that the quality would decline again the following week. Referring to one specific case, Thelma said that a child had given her the following excuse for not having homework done:

I don't have my homework... because daddy had his cocaine in it and the... Emergency Response Unit [an armed unit of An Garda Síochána – the usually unarmed Irish police] kicked in the door last night and took the [school] bag as evidence.

Two teachers spoke about support or maternal involvement with regard to homework having been extremely limited or, as Teresa put it, 'non-existent' at home, but both of these participants felt that this would have been the case even prior to a father's removal from the home. However, Thelma reported cases in which fathers were very much in support of homework and said that, in such cases, the quality of homework declined.

7.14.2.3 Attendance

Teachers also spoke about children's attendance at school as having an effect on children's academic performance. Some considered paternal incarceration to have had a negative impact on attendance, at least initially – straight after fathers were arrested or taken into custody. For example, Tara referred to a number of cases in which children were 'out of school a *lot* [original emphasis]' and experiencing other disruptions to routine which she believed were related to the pressure mothers were under to gather bail money or seek character references for fathers (to be used at sentencing hearings). Indeed, sometimes children's attendance was considered to be linked to maternal coping skills and some teachers thought it might have been an issue for certain children regardless of fathers' situations. Tara said: 'Mam is a bit scatty for want of a better word.... Attendance was an issue obviously around... [the time of her child's father's imprisonment] but I'd say, aside from all that, it'll always be a bit of an issue'. Similarly, Tom stated that a boy in his class was absent more frequently while his father was in prison but that he had a high rate of absence *anyway*. The notion of mothers'/carers' coping skills having an impact on children's attendance will be discussed further in the next chapter. Teachers also talked about children missing school in order to go to visit their fathers in prison and, when one girl's father was granted temporary release for her Confirmation, she was reportedly out of school for most of that week (Tara).

On the other hand, some said there was no noticeable effect in relation to attendance; Tracy referred to a boy's attendance having been excellent all year. And two teachers claimed that attendance had actually improved when fathers were in prison. For example, Tara said that one boy's attendance, which was said to have been 'so bad it was shocking' when his father was at home, stabilised when his father

went to prison. And while Tara thought this might be due to a more stable home environment overall when a father is imprisoned, Thelma suggested a different reason why this might be the case:

attendance tends to improve when the daddy's in prison because the family feel that 'Now, we're under the scrutiny. Now we're being watched'. So attendance will usually improve. You get kids, like, literally like a drive-by shooting, the mother will just open the car door and horse [ie, push] the child out to get him into school because they feel [that they are then] under the eye of the authorities.

7.14.3 Mothers'/carers' accounts

Three mothers stated that their children's fathers' incarceration had no effect on their children's academic performance. For example, Melissa pointed out that her 'clever' son did not struggle in any curricular areas and was ahead of his peers and Monica said that her daughter had always performed well at school and even suggested that the situation might have led to her being more focused. She explained that the reason the girl's father's imprisonment had not interfered with her schoolwork was that Monica herself was in a position to give of her time (helping with homework, etc.) and she stated that some other mothers she knew were not able to do that. Monica also pointed out that the girl's father, were he not in prison, could have been a distraction in the home, whereas when it was just the girl, her mother and her little sister at home, 'she had more time to study... more time to sit down and do her work and that, instead of looking at [Monica] all day'. Mary talked about her daughter's lackadaisical approach to homework being the reason why she ended up enrolling her in the school's homework club and Melanie was unsure if her partner's incarceration had had any effect on her child's academic performance, surmising that the girl may have been too young for any changes in this regard to be obvious. However, as previously mentioned, her difficult living situation meant that her child's school bag was in her own mother's house and she believed her daughter had not received a new school reading book for some time because she had not returned the previous one. Carol believed that the incarceration of her grandchildren's father had an effect on some of the children insofar as concentration levels were concerned. She described one girl as very intelligent but felt that her

father's situation ultimately resulted in the girl going on to fail her Leaving Certificate⁶⁸, whereas a boy in the family had done very well.

7.14.4 Fathers' accounts

Two fathers gave extremely brief (and what might be deemed subjective) accounts of their children's academic performance; both agreed that imprisonment had had no effect on their children's schoolwork or performance and Finbar referred to his daughters as clever, while Fergal said his daughter was doing very well at school and that he could see her handwriting improving in cards she had sent to the prison over the years. Frank spoke very positively about two of his children, saying that their grades were very good and that they received 'nothing but praise' from teachers. He claimed that his daughter was top of her class and always getting the school's 'Best Pupil Award', to the point that she was told she could not receive it again because she had done so so many times. Fred and Fintan stated that their sons were performing satisfactorily or were 'alright at readin' an' writin' (Fintan). However, they also referred to difficulties their children had had previously (since their imprisonment). For example, Fred's son was described as being easily and often distracted and 'a bit slow to learn', but with the help of some additional academic support in school, his grades had started to improve slightly. Fintan considered his son to be somewhat behind his peers since his own confinement. Having made some progress after the initial upheaval of his father's incarceration, the boy's behaviour then deteriorated and, according to Fintan, this had had a negative impact on his level of academic achievement.

7.14.5 Professionals' accounts

Insofar as children's academic performance was concerned, support group staff members' accounts (and in particular Stacey's) tended to focus on comparisons between their achievement prior to their engagement with support services and that after their engagement. For example, one girl who was described as a possible genius was said to have been unable to concentrate or even think prior to therapy, tending to sit 'staring into space' in class (Stacey). She reportedly performed very

⁶⁸ The final state examination in Irish schools, usually taken at the age of 17/18.

well afterwards. Two boys who were considered well below average started to apply themselves after therapy and went on to do very well, even 'excel'. Stacey explained that one of these boys in particular:

had the intelligence; the block was... the anger [and] resentment [he felt] and also the shock was still there in the brain, in the head, of seeing his father commit the crime... He actually saw [it] and it was horrific.

Perhaps one of the most insightful accounts was Barry's written account of his own academic achievement. Offering insight into the effect paternal incarceration can have on children's concentration levels, he wrote:

It doesn't affect my schoolwork because I can study, because I'm interested in my schoolwork... [but] in school sometimes, when the teacher's talking, my mind just drifts away... I think about in prison [sic].

Stacey tried to explain why she considered children's academic performance to be affected by paternal incarceration and why additional academic support (for example, from Special Needs Assistants or resource teachers) generally did not make any notable difference, academically-speaking. She claimed that it was:

because that shock, that disbelief, that... shame is just so much and so heavy-weighting; they can't get through it [original emphasis]. There's too much there for them to [deal with].

With regard to homework, Sarah referred to a case in which a father's imprisonment resulted in his child never having homework done because, she claimed, the child's mother had no interest in her son's education and was unwilling to support him at home. This child was given one-to-one time with the school's HSCL teacher each day, specifically so that he could do his homework with her. Attendance was also mentioned by Garrett, who believed that one particular mother's anxiety and poor coping skills was going to have a significant impact on her son's attendance throughout his school life. This comment is explored in more detail in the next chapter (see section 8.2.1.2 – *Poor maternal coping skills*).

7.15 Conclusion

This chapter explored the experiences of children with incarcerated fathers and considered children's, as well as other key figures', interpretations of these experiences. The manner in which experiences and interpretations had an impact on children's attitudes to school and learning, approaches to schoolwork and academic performance was also explored. The next chapter involves a further examination of these issues, as they relate to relationships and interactions concerning children's academic lives.

Chapter Eight

Findings 2

8.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the experiences of a sample of children in Ireland, each of whom had a father in prison, and discussed those children's interpretations of these experiences alongside the interpretations of key figures in their lives. This chapter outlines findings in relation to the fourth research question, looking at how these experiences and interpretations can have effects on interactions relating to children's academic lives. I consider below children's relationships and interactions with mothers/carers and then with fathers. I then examine how children's experiences and interpretations of their experiences can have impacts on interactions between home and school. I subsequently discuss children's relationships with teachers and their interactions with peers and extended families. Fathers' relationships with mothers/carers and interactions at a community level are examined in separate sections and, finally, I consider families' interactions with the justice system, the media and support services.

8.2 Children's relationships and interactions with mothers/carers

Children's relationships and interactions with mothers/carers can have a considerable effect on their adjustment. It is clear from the data that the single most important factor in this regard was the extent to which mothers/carers coped well with the circumstances.

8.2.1 Coping on the part of mothers/carers

8.2.1.1 Challenges faced by mothers/carers

Being a single parent can be difficult and in cases of paternal incarceration there can be additional pressures. For example, participants noted the practical challenges surrounding prison visits, as well as the pressure to support fathers by identifying and approaching people who might be in a position to write character references.

With respect to the latter, Tara suggested that this pressure might emanate from fathers' families or, particularly in the case of Travellers, from the entire community. In addition, there were references to the financial difficulties the imprisonment of a father can generate and while, as Teresa put it, certain families might 'never have been very stable financially anyway', there was evidence to suggest that circumstances tended to get worse after fathers were taken into custody. For example, Tara described one family's attempts to gather enough money to pay bail so a father could attend his daughter's Confirmation and, even though she was glad they were successful and that the girl had her father there on the day, Tara said that she could not help but consider the financial pressure the family felt as a result and wonder what they had given up. And of course, mothers/carers were themselves attempting to come to terms with a partner's/son's/brother's imprisonment and the circumstances in which they found themselves, which many found difficult and upsetting. It seemed that mothers/carers were rarely, if ever, "off duty". Indeed, there were seven interruptions during four (of the five) interviews with mothers/carers (as opposed to none during the remainder of the interviews).⁶⁹ These were mainly interruptions by children or by phone calls or visits from extended family members, children or fathers in prison. Overall, according to the data, paternal incarceration was generally a life-altering event in mothers'/carers' lives and, as Tara pointed out, how mothers coped with a father's imprisonment often had direct impacts on how children dealt with it.

8.2.1.2 Poor maternal coping skills

Twenty of the 21 participants in the research referred to the busy workload of individual mothers/carers. Nineteen of these references combined to paint a very bleak picture of mothers who, at best, found it difficult to do so such things as bring children to football training or manage (albeit with 'great stress' - Frank). At worst, they went 'into meltdown', suffered from depression, had nervous breakdowns and, in one case, committed suicide. Fathers repeatedly referred to their imprisonment being difficult or upsetting for their children's mothers due to the extra pressure these absences caused and voiced the belief that life would be, as Flynn stated, 'a hell

⁶⁹ The carer whose interview was not interrupted was no longer caring for the children concerned as they had since grown up.

of a lot easier' for mothers were they at home to help out. Some referred to the busy schedules mothers had as they attempted to balance work commitments with everything that was going on at home. And despite fathers overall being of the opinion that their partners or children's mothers were doing the best they could, most were in agreement that mothers were stressed and, as Flynn put it, not able to 'stay on top of it [all]', the most extreme outcome of which was maternal suicide (as discussed in Chapter Seven).

Mothers described some of the difficulties they experienced after fathers were taken into custody. For example, Melissa said she found it difficult to bring her child to football training or matches because she had other younger children and Melanie explained how difficult she initially found the morning routine without her partner's help: 'I found it very, very hard to... get up in the mornings, to get the three kids ready.... it was tough. It still is hard... but we'll get there'. Other mothers/carers described the emotional effect fathers' imprisonment had on them. For example, Carol stated: 'when it happened first... I couldn't deal with it. What I used [to] do was come to work, wouldn't talk to anyone, [then] go home and drink'. She explained that her boss took her aside one day, advising her that she would not last and would be of no help to her grandchildren if she continued on that path, and gave her information about a support group for families of prisoners. Carol said, 'I had to pull myself together... [for] the children'. Her son (unknown to her at the time) had been the primary carer for his children. As she put it: 'He was the mammy: washing them and cleaning them and doing their hair'. After his imprisonment, the children's mother did not take over his role and, instead, 'went haywire'. She started seeing another man whom she visited for entire weekends and resorted to locking the children in the house while she was gone.⁷⁰ Carol said that, according to her grandchildren, their mother had told them not to tell her (ie, Carol) anything and that, if they did, Carol would take them away and have them 'put into a home'. She believed that was the reason the children had not told her about the neglect: 'she had this thing over them: it's either this or you can go into a home'. Nevertheless,

⁷⁰ A neighbour told the children's grandmother much later that one of the children had managed to open the sitting-room window one day and reportedly asked her, 'Could you get us some food? We're starving'. When asked why she had not done anything at the time, she replied that the neighbours were 'terrified' of the children's mother.

the children's mother left with her new partner after a matter of weeks and the children were taken in by Carol. Over the following years, balancing full-time work with the responsibility of caring for her grandchildren (while putting on a cheerful demeanour) took a toll on the participant and, once the children were essentially raised, she suffered a nervous breakdown: 'when it was all over... I just crashed'. Two mothers/carers referred to other mothers they knew who went 'into meltdown' following the imprisonment of children's fathers. For example, Carol spoke of a woman with four or five children who was addicted to heroin and whose partner was taken into custody. As she pointed out, those children had no-one to guide or look after them and she believed they did not have 'a hope in hell' of living normal lives and were more likely to leave school early.

Professionals (including teachers) referred to mothers/carers being distressed, anxious and unable to cope or 'juggle things' following the imprisonment of fathers. For example, as previously mentioned, Thelma spoke of one mother (described as an alcoholic) who was said to be incapable of getting out of bed herself in the morning, not to mention getting two children ready for school. Others spoke of mothers/carers being isolated, emotional, 'raw' and unable to cope. A child whose father gave her 'a *massive* amount of attention [original emphasis]' prior to his sentence started misbehaving at school after he was imprisoned. Sarah believed this was due to the sudden lack of attention as the child's mother was said to have been suffering with severe depression and incapable of assuming the role of the child's father in this regard. Another mother was said to 'shout and scream and rant and rave' at her son instead of talking to him (or to professionals). Even when mothers/carers appeared to be coping well, this was not always the case, as Carol explained: 'people used to be saying to me, "You're the strongest woman I know" and... I used to be shaking inside... I was putting on this front... : "I can do it. I can do it" and then [I realised] I really couldn't'.

According to the data, poor maternal coping can have a number of direct effects on a child's academic life. The most frequently mentioned was mothers/carers not being able to get out of bed in the morning (either as a result of depression or sheer exhaustion) to get their children ready for and bring them to school. For example,

Thelma said of a boy whom she taught: 'He just left [school] himself in the end, just refused to go in and mommy wasn't going to make him... she wasn't up most of the days'. As previously mentioned, Garrett, speaking of a mother of a pre-school child, explained how her anxiety would continue to have a negative impact on his attendance at school:

That boy will miss a lot of time in school because the mother can't cope. She's in with him, with runny noses, the whole time. There's a lot of anxiety there around being a single mother.

Garrett implied that, in the absence of another adult in the home, this lady was becoming exceptionally anxious and overly cautious at the sight of the slightest symptom, which resulted in a lot of unnecessary visits to the doctor's surgery, at the expense of the son's attendance at pre-school.

Poor coping on the part of mothers also had a number of indirect effects; some children developed additional worries and/or assumed new roles in the household. For example, Mary explained that she was very upset after her partner's imprisonment and often cried in front of her daughter. As a consequence, her daughter became worried about her and would often inquire if she was alright. If the girl was speaking about her father, she would pay close attention to Mary's expression to ensure she was not upsetting her: 'she'd look at me and then she'd say, "I'll stop now... 'cause I think you're getting upset, mam" '. Mary reported noticing that her daughter was very caring towards her after the father was taken into custody (in a way that she would not have been before) and said she felt her daughter had made attempts to mind her after the imprisonment. She stated that, over time, she learned to keep her feelings to herself and be strong for her daughter's sake.

Tracy stated that the boy in her class worried about his mother a lot and explained that he appeared to have taken on the role of 'head of the household'. She described the lengths to which the boy went to plan his mother's birthday celebration to illustrate this. Frank spoke about his daughter being very helpful around the house after his imprisonment and his sons 'carrying on regardless', but it was unclear if Frank's imprisonment had had any influence on these behaviours or if they would

have been so regardless. Flynn said that he repeatedly told his sons, particularly his oldest son, to look after and help their mother and described to them their new roles in the family:

I do try explain that to them... 'I'm gone now, yeah? Yous are the men of the house... You've to help out. You've to make sure your little sister and little brothers are alright and just have to step in there and... help your mother do things [so that she is] not going running around after four of yiz.⁷¹ Yous are big enough now to bleedin' [bloody well] tie your own laces... If you can do [something], do it; don't expect your mother to do it'.

He went on to describe a phone conversation he had with his oldest son one particular day when his partner was feeling stressed while at home alone with four children, including a crying baby:

So I got [Name of son] on the phone [and] said, 'Listen, your mother's bleedin' stressed out of her brains... looking after, running around after yiz all. Take your little brother... and bring him into the bedroom'. I said, 'Go in and play your computer for 20 minutes and give him a bottle or something, give your ma a break'.

Flynn was conscious of the fact that his son was still just a child and considered it somewhat unfair to ask him to take on the responsibility of caring for his younger siblings, but he felt it was the only option available and one which was not altogether unfamiliar:

It prob'ly is wrong. He's only a kid and he shouldn't be getting done with but, look, we all have to help out and... things have to be done. I had to do it when I was a kid... I'd hope to think... it is the way everyone else'd try do it.

Carol spoke about one group of children whose parents both had drug addictions and whose father was a repeat offender. She said it was clear that roles had been reversed in that particular household. As she put it, 'it's the children [who] are minding the parents'.

⁷¹ Like yous, yiz is a form of second-person plural pronoun commonly heard in inner-city Dublin.

8.2.1.3 Maternal coping

On the other hand, three references were made to positive cases. Tara claimed that, in her experience, the amount of support a mother is able to give to her child and how stable and strong she is are crucial elements in a child's adjustment and future prospects. She referred to one exceptionally strong mother who, although very young, appeared to be very capable and did everything in her power to support her child, whom Tara described as 'a really good, well-rounded kid'. This mother had separated from the child's father but believed that it was important to maintain the relationship between father and child: 'he is what he is but he's still my daughter's father'. Tara said that the mother's attitude could be summed up by her saying: 'You do whatever you need to do for your child' and was of the opinion that there would have been a very different outcome for this child had she had a different mother.

Tara claimed that, at times, the removal of a father from the home actually stabilised the whole family, particularly in cases involving repeat offenders. She explained that, in her experience, when fathers had been in prison for some time life tended to become more settled for families. Although she was careful to point out that this was not always the case, she said that things often became 'a bit calmer [and] a bit more stable in a very weird way'. She gave the example of another very capable mother who was under a lot of pressure and yet always did as much as she possibly could for her children despite the (repeated) imprisonment of their father. At one point, teachers noticed that she appeared to be less adept at coping than usual and they grew to suspect that it was because the children's father had been out of prison for so long; having observed an improvement when the father was imprisoned again, they concluded that the woman was 'much better able to cope' when he was serving a prison sentence. Tara admitted looking forward to his next sentence from the point of view of the children's stability and said that their mother would then be able go about her routine 'without having to deal with him as well'. Tara spoke of regular police raids at the halting site that housed the Traveller population in their school and claimed that after each raid at least one mother would, referring to a partner, say something like 'I wish he'd been picked up' or 'I was hoping that [the police] were going to take him up [ie, arrest him] but he got away; he was off buying a car'. She explained that such mothers had become so accustomed to their partners'

incarceration (and the routine that followed) that they were better able to cope when they had full responsibility for the children and they actually saw a father's incarceration as an opportunity to have somewhat of a 'break'. Having said this, she pointed out that this was not usually the case for partners of first-time offenders, for whom the event was a much bigger shock.

The final positive reference was made by Monica who believed that her children's father's imprisonment had not interfered with the children's schoolwork because she had put them and their needs first – 'before anyone, before myself even' – and made sure they were at school every day. Monica said that some mothers whom she knew were not able to do likewise and struggled considerably with their new circumstances and she again referred to mothers not wanting to get out of bed (and therefore not bringing their children to school) because they were depressed.

8.2.2 Children's behaviour and maternal discipline and general parenting

The second most salient theme in relation to children's relationships and interactions with mothers/carers concerned behavioural issues in the home and maternal discipline or overall parenting skills. Seven of the 11 parents and six of the teachers and other professionals talked about children playing up for their mothers or otherwise displaying some form of problematic behaviour at home following the incarceration of their fathers. Four did not comment and another four parents said their children were overall very good. Having said this, even in cases of the latter, parents reported minor changes in how their children behaved.

Behavioural issues ranged from children squabbling with siblings to children smoking and watching pornographic videos on their smartphones. Mary said she had noticed a change in her daughter's attitude since her father had been imprisoned, describing her as cheeky, and Flynn spoke about his partner continuously 'stampin' the foot for authority'. Fred stated that his children were 'spoilt little brats', acting up for their mother (but not for other people such as their aunt) and claimed that he had told his partner that she needed to be stricter. Monica felt that the extent to which a mother can cope can affect discipline in the home,

stating that mothers who had not got the tools to cope often let children 'run riot'. On the other hand, Carol and Fintan described cases in which children knew carers to be stricter than their mothers had been and Carol stated that three of her four grandchildren regularly claimed they hated living with her, viewing her as 'the worst in the world' because of the curfews and strict routines she had imposed.

Some children considered a father's imprisonment to be a chance to get away with behaviour for which they would normally get into trouble and children often took advantage of the situation. In three cases, this involved children playing on parental guilt or even pitting their fathers against their mothers/carers. For example, Fergal explained that his son 'kind of thrives on' the situation at times:

if he come [sic] up on a visit... he'd be sitting there and he'd be all sad and I'll say 'What's wrong with ya?'. 'Mammy was bold [ie, behaved badly]'... She'd say, 'No, [Name of boy] was bold' and he'd say 'I wasn't'. So he'd be telling me his story, she'd be telling me his story [sic]... and I'd be stuck in the middle of the two of them and I'd say 'Look, what am I supposed to do?' She's saying to me 'Give out to him, like, tell him he's not allowed do that' and then he's saying to me 'No, you've to give out to mammy'.

Children complaining about mothers/carers while on the phone to fathers and attempting to enlist fathers' support was mentioned by other participants as well. For example, Mary recalled her daughter, during a tantrum, threatening: 'I'm telling my father about you'. Mary went on to explain that the completion of a parenting course for mothers/carers and fathers (run by a support group for families of prisoners in consultation with the IPS and other relevant agencies) resulted in both parents agreeing to 'go the same way instead of one saying one thing and one saying another thing'.

Tess recalled a mother telling her about her son's behaviour at home; she told Tess that when she refused to buy, give or get him something he wanted the boy would say something along the lines of: 'Ah, it's grand... me nanny [his father's mother] will get it for me anyway' (discussed further in section 8.7 – *Children's/Families' relationships and interactions with extended families*).

Linked somewhat to this, two teachers referred to mothers, and Monica herself admitted, spoiling children in order to compensate in some way for the father's absence. For some, this meant giving them material goods. As Tess, speaking about a boy who she believed to be 'totally spoiled', put it: 'whatever he wants pretty much he gets it because [of] the guilt [his parents feel]... That's how they compensate'. For others, spoiling a child meant being more lenient when children were unwilling (or particularly wanted) to do something. For example, Tom believed that parents of a boy whom he taught were inclined to let him stay at home from school more often when his father was serving a prison sentence:

if he was crying in the morning saying he didn't want to go in [to school], they might have been a bit softer about taking him in during that period... he was absent a bit more frequently [at that time].

And, for still others, it could result in a combination of these two forms of spoiling, as a mother, speaking of her daughter, explained:

she will not put her hands into water and wash a cup. She'd rather starve if she... hadn't a bowl [in which] to put cereal. She's spoilt but, in saying that, I done [sic] that to her because she was so young when [her father] went in [to prison]. I was making up [for his absence], giving her everything... You don't know any better. You just think, 'I have to make up [for the fact that] he's not here'.

Four professionals spoke of poor parenting skills or 'ongoing issues around parenting' essentially being the cause of many of the problems experienced by children in relation to behavioural issues. Garrett went so far as to say that 'if that young boy was born into a different family, he would be perfectly fine... guaranteed', a thought echoed by Tara in relation to a girl in her school. As previously mentioned, matters improved in Mary's family after parents participated in a parenting course; Mary stated that her initial score of zero on a parenting questionnaire administered at the beginning of the course had, by the time of course completion, increased to eight.

Some mothers/carers looked to teachers for assistance in disciplining their children. Sometimes, the threat of a teacher's input was enough to discourage bad behaviour. As Fergal explained: 'He's not even afraid of his mam... Every time he does anything...

she says, “I’m gonna tell [Name of teacher] on ya”. “No, no, I’m sorry, I’m sorry” – that’s all he says’. However, on other occasions, the threat of a teacher’s involvement was of no consequence to children; Tess stated that she had been told one mother, when her son was misbehaving, would say to him, ‘I’m going to have to have a chat with [Tess]’, a threat that was generally met with an indifferent shrug. But sometimes teachers were approached by mothers/carers who were desperate for some support in the disciplining of their children. For example, Thelma stated ‘we’d have mothers in crying, going, “Can ya make ‘im do it?” “Can ya try an’ get ‘im to do this?”’. Tara said that mothers/carers who were in need of assistance in this regard tended to say things such as ‘I’m finding him really difficult at home’, ‘He’s giving me a really hard time at home’, ‘I don’t really know what’s going on in his head at the moment’ or ‘He’s being a bit more of a brat than usual’. She claimed that mothers/carers of *boys* were more likely to approach the school in search of help because boys tended to push the boundaries to a greater extent with their mothers. And Thelma said that behaviour was likely to become more challenging as children got older: ‘once kids get to Fifth and Sixth Class, they’ll just tell their mothers to F off [sic]’ and that these parents would often then approach the school or individual teachers.

Thelma explained that a lot of the mothers she knew could not handle their children after their fathers’ imprisonment and resorted to medicating them (most often administering Ritalin after a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder [hereafter ADHD]) in order to modulate their behaviour and make their lives easier. She explained that there might also be a financial reason for mothers/carers to seek such medical diagnoses for children; parents of children with severe disabilities, who require particular and ongoing care and attention are entitled to a Domiciliary Care Allowance⁷² (DEASP, 2017a). At the time of writing, this allowance amounted to €309.50 per month and was received in addition to the usual Child Benefit payment (DEASP, 2017a). Thelma was of the opinion that many children considered to be suffering from ADHD were, in fact, just ‘out of control’ as a consequence of bad

⁷² ‘Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) is a monthly payment for a child aged under 16 with a severe disability, who requires ongoing care and attention, substantially over and above the care and attention usually required by a child of the same age’ (DEASP, 2017a).

parenting. She pointed out, 'You can't have ADHD and be fine in school and be brutal at home'. On this point, three professionals said that behavioural symptoms that often were believed to be related to ADHD (or even autism) were usually a sign of deeper emotional problems.⁷³ As Stacey said of one boy: 'He wasn't all these funny things... Autism or anything like that'. He was just plain hurt [and] scared out of his wits'. However, whether mothers who overlooked alternative explanations for their children's behaviour in favour of a medical diagnosis did so intentionally or not (and it could be that ill advice or ignorance might have been to blame, at least in some instances), Thelma claimed that many were fully aware of what they needed to write on the relevant forms in order to secure the Domiciliary Care Allowance, saying:

where we have put, 'No, no, no, no, no' [on an assessment form]... the mother knows to put, 'Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes'... so she'll get the grant.

8.3 Children's relationships and interactions with fathers

The incarceration of a father and the events surrounding such a situation can (perhaps obviously) have a number of impacts on the relationship and interactions between a father and his child(ren). In this regard, my research highlighted three main areas of concern, all of which had implications for children's overall adjustment and some of which had direct repercussions with regard to children's academic lives. The three issues were:

- maintaining the father-child bond,
- discipline and
- specific school-related voids left by absent fathers.

8.3.1 Maintaining the father-child bond

The most frequently discussed issue in relation to children's relationships and interactions with fathers was maintaining the father-child bond. Flynn spoke of witnessing the rearing of his children 'from the back seat', while Monica stated matter-of-factly, 'You do lose your bond with your kids... when you're in prison'. Several participants spoke about the significance of fathers missing important events in their children's lives (such as Catholic First Holy Communion) as having

⁷³ For an interesting article in support of this view, see Wedge (2012).

the result that bonds between fathers and children were weakened. As previously mentioned, there were cases in which children had ceased visiting or never visited fathers in prison (usually as a result of parental separation or maternal gatekeeping).⁷⁴ This might be considered more significant for those children whose fathers were repeat offenders or were serving particularly long sentences. For example, Flynn had been a free man for just 12 months in the previous 11 years, that is, since his children were born. In these cases, there were obvious difficulties surrounding the maintenance of father-child relationships. As Flynn put it: 'it's a hard thing to do from behind a prison wall'.

However, even when children visited or received regular phone-calls from fathers, there appeared to be a lack of meaningful contact and fathers appeared to be unaware of much of the detail of their children's daily lives. For example, some fathers reported being unsure if their children were being treated differently by anybody on account of their fathers' circumstances and if their children had been inclined to tell people where the father was. Although in many cases, this apparent ignorance was considered to be a direct result of not being present in the home, it was not always so. For example, when asked if his children spoke to him about their interactions at school, Finbar stated, '[they] do but I don't really take no notice 'cause they're not too bold... in school', suggesting that some fathers (or at least Finbar) might not display any interest in their (or his) children's academic lives unless required to do so due to behavioural issues.

Others were unaware of how their children felt about their incarceration, who their friends were, what hobbies their children enjoyed and the like. Two fathers said that their partners would be the only ones who knew such information and Flynn stated that 'half the blokes in here... wouldn't know their arse from their elbow'⁷⁵ and would not realise or think of the impacts their imprisonment could be having

⁷⁴ There were also two cases of children choosing to cease visits themselves. As previously mentioned, one of these resulted from a child's desire to resolve a parents' dispute over whether or not he would visit his father in prison and the other decided not to visit his father because he was afraid of the dogs used during prison searches.

⁷⁵ A common British and Irish idiom to indicate confusion or ignorance.

on their children, adding that he had not considered all of the ways in which his imprisonment might be affecting his children:

only now when you're talking to me as well,... certain things be clicking [sic] and certain things be coming up [sic]. My brain is a mush from the drugs... and I've prob'ly been blocked off from half of the stuff... [I] had me blinkers on, man. [I have] been off me game⁷⁶... thinking, 'Aw yeah, everything is grand'.

For those children who visited a father in prison, the average frequency of their visits was once a month (as previously stated) but a general lack of opportunities for *quality* contact with fathers was seen as a crucial factor with regard to maintaining father-child relationships. Monica recalled her children not being able to cuddle or touch their father in case prison officers would end the visit. Frank said he was reluctant to initiate meaningful conversations with his children during visits. For example, he wanted to know how they really felt about his being in prison and if they were coping, but as he said, visits were 'emotional enough' without asking questions such as those and he did not want to upset them (or himself): 'it's very hard out there [in the visiting area of the prison]... You're surrounded by people and... it's not a place to be shedding tears - in front of people'. He hoped to have the conversation with his children when he eventually moved to an open prison. Flynn explained that it was difficult to keep the bond with his daughter during a half hour visit when she was settling in (or playing with other children) for almost all of that time and he was only starting to engage and play with her when the visit was due to finish. Again, open prisons were referred to as places in which it was easier to maintain the father-child bond because visits could take place over a cup of tea in a kitchen, an environment more consistent with a natural family setting. Phone calls were generally considered (by fathers) to be too short in duration. As Finbar put it: 'You can't really talk here on the phone.... You can't ask questions... because you've only five minutes a call, like, so you're cut off straight away... You can't get into anything'. He also said that his daughters often wasted time squabbling over why he rang one of them and not the other: 'so there's three minutes gone alone arguing' and fathers of younger children said that their children generally only wanted to stay on the phone for short periods anyway, after which they wanted to play.

⁷⁶ Another common British/Irish idiom meaning unable to concentrate.

In an attempt to keep up a certain level of contact with their children, fathers often sent out items they had made in prison or made phone-calls to try to procure certain things for their children. For example, some fathers made cushions and pillow covers, one made a rocking horse and one made arrangements for flower pots, seeds and moss peat to be delivered to his son who had displayed an interest in gardening. Similarly, children reportedly sent or brought Father's Day cards, birthday cards, schoolwork and class photographs to the prison. Fergal, who had heard of the Storybook Dads' scheme that originated in the United Kingdom in 2003, stated that he had approached the relevant prison staff in an attempt to have it introduced in the prison in which he resided⁷⁷ so that he could send DVDs/CDs of himself reading bedtime stories to his child. He felt that the scheme would help him to interact and gradually build a relationship with his child. He noted that other fathers might also be interested in the scheme because 'as ya get older and you're in prison, ya realise the things you've lost and the things ya have out there'.

However, two parents' accounts provided a reminder that the actual absence of a father does not necessarily mean that the father-child bond is destined to be damaged, in the same way as the *presence* of a father does not guarantee an automatic harmonious relationship between a father and his child. Firstly, Melissa claimed that her son had an 'unbelievable bond' with his father, despite having been only a few months old when his father was incarcerated. She believed that her attempts to encourage the relationship had played a role in this: 'I've always kept it good between them'. Having said this, she explained that sometimes her son (who was not particularly fond of speaking to people on the phone) would go for weeks without having a proper conversation with his father, saying, 'No, I've no news for daddy' and be content to listen and contribute sporadically to a group conversation while the phone was on loudspeaker, whereas occasionally he would speak for the entire duration of the call: 'he goes in and out of humours like that'. She said that

⁷⁷ At the time of writing, the scheme had been introduced to two prisons in the Republic of Ireland, but not in this particular prison (Storybook Dads, 2017). (See www.storybookdads.org.uk for more details about the scheme.)

their close relationship was most evident during prison visits and she marvelled at how comfortable they were in each other's company:

They're mad about one another... There'd be no awkward silences... They haven't been together [but] it's not like they don't know what way to act together... It's unreal.

She mentioned that her son had plans to go to Old Trafford football ground with his father, on his release, and said that her son was eagerly anticipating the trip.

Second, after his son had blamed him for his mother's suicide and all that followed, Fintan found it very difficult to try to ameliorate the situation or regain his son's affection in any way from prison. He said: 'I'm trying to figure out what could I do to change that... I've tried writing to him.... I've tried everything.... I'm hitting a brick wall [original emphasis]'. And while some of these difficulties could easily have been attributed to lack of face-to-face contact due to his incarceration, this was not the case, as he went on to explain.

I got out there just before Christmas on bail and nah [no] – [he] won't even look at me, won't even acknowledge me... I walked into the house, he'll walk out of the house. [I] tried to talk to him; [he] just... walked away.

8.3.2 Paternal discipline and general forms of parenting

Discipline was also an important feature in discussions relating to children's relationships and interactions with fathers. For many of the children in this study, fathers played the role of disciplinarian prior to their imprisonment and when a father is imprisoned it can be, as Frank stated, a case of 'when the cat's away...'. As Thelma pointed out, children can think, 'Dad's gone. Wahoo!... I have no-one to stop me doing anything now'. Frank put it simply: 'they all act up because I'm not there'. Indeed, 13 participants claimed that their children's behaviour had been problematic after fathers were taken into custody. Three parents stated that fathers, after being imprisoned, were unlikely to chastise children who had been naughty and two fathers attempted to explain why this was the case. Fergal said:

if he's being bold... I haven't got the heart to give out to [ie, reprimand] him. I couldn't.... it'd be very, very hypocritical of me to give out to him,

and went on to say that he was afraid to do so:

it scares me.... What if I mess up? What if things don't go right?... I don't discipline him now but if I started trying to discipline him, [I ask myself] will he resent me for it? Will it turn him against me?... I don't know what to be doing.

Similarly, Flynn explained: 'I feel like I can't give out... [I] feel guilty for... missing out... I wouldn't even raise me [sic] voice to them', but felt that his children would obey him if he were to give a direct order. Flynn's style of disciplining his children appeared to be quite jovial in nature. He said that during visits he would jokingly say to them, 'What's going on here? Your ma's after telling me [she] caught yiz at the bleedin' bridge smoking. I'll break your fingers, I'm tellin' ya', but pointed out (contrary to his previous statement) that his children tended not to pay much attention to him because he was not the person who disciplined them. On the other hand, Fred, speaking of his role as disciplinarian, said that his children knew 'damn well' not to 'cross' him (ie, go against his wishes): 'They know if I say something I mean it; there's no in-between in it at all', but he was careful to add that he had never raised a hand to any of his children. Melissa said that her son (whom she described as a well-behaved child anyway) would be more inclined to listen to his father than to her, explaining that if he was playing up for her at home, she would tell his father and the misbehaviour would stop immediately. The boy's father would simply have to say 'That was wrong to do that to mammy or say that... Don't let me down. I think you should apologise to mammy' and the boy would do so. While speaking about discipline or parenting more generally, some fathers referred to their own parents and the roles they had (or had not) played in their upbringing. For example, Fergal stated that his father had never read him a bed-time story and Fintan described his family as a large one in which one child 'dragged up the next one'.

8.3.3 Specific school-related voids left by absent fathers

Finally, the roles played by fathers prior to imprisonment and the voids they left appeared to have considerable influence on children's academic lives. For example, of the seven parents whose children had reached school-going age prior to imprisonment, five fathers were said to have done some or all of the school runs (and the other two parents did not say who had brought their children to and from

school). These instances were not limited to fathers who resided with their children before their prison sentence commenced; Tess recalled a father of a boy in her class regularly collecting his son, even after the boy's parents had separated. Tara spoke specifically of a child whose parents both suffered with drug addiction: 'Da... was managing it a bit better... so he'd be dropping [the boy] to school and picking him up... so that's kind of gone to a certain extent because he's not around... anymore'.

Of this same group (seven parents whose children had reached school-going age prior to the father's imprisonment), four reported fathers having helped children with homework before their sentences commenced (although one had not been very confident in his ability to assist). According to fathers, their poor literacy-levels (or, at least, their low levels of confidence in their literacy levels) sometimes prevented them from helping their children with schoolwork. As Flynn stated: 'I never helped with any of that because... I'm no bleedin' good. I'm not... literate or anything... I'm no good with spellings or maths [Mathematics] or stuff' but went on to describe how he had used certain incentives to encourage his children to do their homework instead: 'I'd say, "Right, do your homework and I'll bring you [to] the skate park" [or].... "If you finish your yoke⁷⁸ now I'll bring yiz up [to] the park for an hour". So they'd... do it'. He said that his children had also been inclined to 'try and show off' while they were doing their homework (when he had been at home), apparently in order to let him know that they knew what they were doing.

Assisting (either directly or indirectly) with homework was not the only way in which fathers had encouraged children in an academic sense, prior to their imprisonment. Indeed, Frank said that he had gone to parent-teacher meetings before his sentence commenced and, according to Thelma, the incarceration (and removal from the home) of a father who was 'big into' education meant that his children's education 'went to hell in a hand-basket'. However, the manner in which this father despotically advocated education and coerced his children into accepting that education was 'a good thing' was hardly exemplary and certainly not condoned

⁷⁸ A versatile Irish idiom that can mean more or less anything: an unspecific task, object or even concept. Roughly, it means thing.

by Thelma: 'If you called him in to talk to him about one of the kids and they were misbehaving, he would beat the living daylights out of them... [saying], "Don't be cheekin' your teachers" and that kind of thing'.

It would appear that being "into education" can, on occasion, actually be more aptly described as being "into" avoiding unwanted attention from the authorities. For example, Thelma described a 'pro-school' father's idea of encouraging his child as being to say: 'Don't get in fuckin' trouble or I'll kill ya. I don't want social [workers] down here'. But more common stories of encouragement included the following: Thelma spoke of a father who was not actually living with his son, but who still had the influence to encourage his son to study and described the downward spiral the boy's education had taken (eventually leading to the boy leaving secondary school early) after his imprisonment. However, this was also, it must be said, linked to an inability to cope on the part of the boy's mother (who was a prostitute) and a reportedly 'shocking' degree of neglect.

Finally, as previously mentioned, some fathers were their children's primary carers prior to imprisonment. Carol's son in particular was described as 'the mammy' of the household and his removal from the family home was said to have resulted in an eventual intervention by his children's teachers, who contacted Carol when the children's personal hygiene had reached an unacceptable level. Carol spoke of the children's poor physical condition just a short time after their father's confinement, claiming that head lice had become embedded in their scalps.

8.4 Home-school links

The data generated by this research suggested that the quality of home-school links exerted a considerable influence over children's academic lives, primarily with regard to the level of support teachers were in a position to provide if they were (or were not) fully informed of families' circumstances. Before I discuss the issue of informing schools of the incarceration of fathers, it is worth looking at the broader relationships between families and schools.

8.4.1 Overview

Aside from the normal forms of communication between home and school (ie, parent-teacher meetings and annual school reports), some parents had other dealings with their children's schools. Most interactions were quite positive. For example, Mary reported being a volunteer at her daughters' school's breakfast club and spoke about her children's father having made a photograph frame (in prison) for his daughter to give to her school principal and his wife when they welcomed their first baby. Thelma reported another father (described as a 'very violent gang member [original emphasis]') feeding class pets during holiday periods prior to his incarceration, while another father had donated items to his son's school for fundraising events (Tracy). However, other interactions were not so positive. For example, despite stating that his son's school had generally been supportive, Fred, whose son had 'one or two problems' with a teacher, claimed to have 'sent word out' that he would not hesitate to remove his children from the school if the problem was not addressed satisfactorily. The true significance of the message/threat became clear when he explained that he knew the school was desperate to keep pupil numbers up because it was in danger of losing a teacher on these grounds.

8.4.2 Mothers/Carers seeking support from schools

A number of participants reported mothers/carers approaching schools in search of support. Sometimes requests were for support that was academic in nature or otherwise relevant to their children's school lives (for example, mothers/carers wanting teachers to intervene in instances of bullying), but some mothers/carers did approach schools in search of other forms of support, such as assistance in relation to children's behaviour and discipline at home, as discussed previously. Quite often, teachers were contacted by parents who required financial assistance (with, for example, swimming lessons) or who wanted schools to provide certain items (such as school books) for their children. Tara explained that she would occasionally receive phone calls from mothers, saying things such as 'Oh she hasn't got a school uniform today. Can you get her sorted for a school uniform?'. Finally, school was often considered a point of contact with external support systems and some mothers/carers sought information about their (financial and other) entitlements from school staff. This was particularly so if schools had HSCL posts.

Tara believed it was a promising sign if parents were coming to schools and asking for help, but she was still very mindful of the fact that parents could become dependent on such support. She stated that teachers should take care (and claimed that she was always careful) to ensure that it did not become 'enabling', in that, mothers/carers did not become reliant on such support (with the exception, of course, of academic support for children). In addition to parents initiating contact with school staff, teachers reported contacting mothers/carers in relation to a range of issues, for example, children's hygiene, behaviour and attendance. One teacher asked a father to speak to the older children in the school about the dangers of drugs, a request he politely declined due to concerns regarding the repercussions this might have for his children. I now proceed to discuss the issue of disclosing information about imprisoned fathers to school staff.

8.4.3 Informing teachers/schools of fathers' imprisonment

By far the most salient theme in relation to home-school links was parents' willingness or unwillingness to inform schools of fathers' whereabouts and the outcomes of doing or not doing so. Of the 11 parents interviewed, nine reported that their children's teachers had been informed of fathers' imprisonment. Seven parents decided, for different reasons and with varying levels of enthusiasm, to be open about the imprisonment themselves and Flynn and Frank knew that teachers were aware of their whereabouts and were under the impression that their children themselves had informed teachers. Finbar did not comment and Fintan saw no need, at the level of the macrosystem, to tell teachers:

[he] wouldn't be the only kid around the place where [sic] their dad is in prison... The estate we're on, there would have been other kids... it wouldn't be no big drama.

The culture of an area being a factor which influenced how honest or secretive parents were with teachers was also mentioned by Flynn, whose children had moved around a number of different schools. He explained that, in one (disadvantaged) area in which imprisonment was 'basic'ly the norm for half of the kids', his family had no hesitation in informing teachers but that, in a more middle-class area, they were not inclined to be as forthcoming: 'We just didn't... say

anything'. Interestingly, Fergal, despite his child having received considerable support from his Montessori teachers, felt uncomfortable at the prospect of informing staff at his son's new primary school, stating that:

there's a difference between... [Montessori school] and [primary] school, y'know? I mean, that's what I said to [his partner]... I said 'If any of [the primary school teachers] ask, just tell them... I done [sic] a year or two years or something in Australia working'.

The two teachers for whom teaching children with incarcerated fathers was a common occurrence – Thelma and Tara – stated that some parents decided to inform schools, while others chose not to. This was confirmed by the accounts of the remaining four teachers: Tess and Tom were informed either by mothers or other members of staff (who had been told by mothers), while Tracy and Teresa heard of the respective events on the news.

There was evidence of the presence of a Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) teacher in a school having an impact on some parents' overall perceptions of a school, in that, parents with children in such schools were inclined to speak of school as a more approachable place and/or a more responsive entity, usually mentioning particular HSCL teachers when they spoke about dealings with the school. For example, one mother stated, 'They're more open-minded now in the schools', while another simply said, 'the liaison teachers... they're great teachers'. In line with this, it was more common that parents would initially tell HSCL teachers and principal teachers rather than class teachers, usually because they had developed a rapport with them previously. For example, Tom stated that one mother spoke to the school's HSCL teacher about her partner's imprisonment first because she would have been most familiar with her, while Mary explained:

The principal is great up there... because, before he was principal, he was school liaison officer so I'm linked with him all the time so... if I see any problems - anyone at [her daughter] or anything, I go to the principal before I'd go to the teacher.

8.4.3.1 Reasons for not telling teachers/school

It appeared, in many cases, that parents' perceptions of teachers and schools had an influence on interactions between home and school. For example, some parents were inclined to view teachers and other school staff as people who were different, who lived 'a perfect life' (Carol) and were likely to judge or think differently of them or their children if they knew about a father's imprisonment. These perceptions often influenced the level of honesty with which some parents explained a father's absence to school staff. Indeed, the reasons given for not telling teachers included parental fears about how their child(ren) would be viewed. Fergal, speaking of his son, said he did not want people at school to 'look at him different [sic]', while Melissa stated that she 'would never *dream* [original emphasis]' of approaching teachers or asking them to keep an eye on her son (in case he was being excluded or bullied because of his father's imprisonment) because she was afraid that they would think her child was unruly, even though she described him as (and, in my brief encounter with him, he appeared to be) a very well-behaved and mannerly boy.

Fears about how the entire family would be perceived were also to the forefront of parents' minds. Fergal told his partner not to tell the primary school teachers because he did not want teachers 'looking down their nose [sic]' at his son. He believed that teachers would think the boy had 'bad parents' if they knew the truth and he feared the knowledge would lead to his son, as the idiom goes, starting off on the wrong foot. Echoing this sentiment, Melissa spoke about her fear that people's first impressions of her child would be affected by their assumptions regarding or perceptions of the family unit. She was afraid that people would think she was a 'scumbag' because her son's father was in prison. Another mother, who had ended up telling teachers so that they could support her application to have her partner released for a few days to celebrate their child's First Communion, reportedly said to Carol, 'I used to be always dreading in case the teachers'd find out 'cause they'd look down at you'. The way in which these perceptions of a child and/or family could manifest themselves in people's treatment of the child was a real concern for some mothers, while others spoke of embarrassment and a (seemingly unfounded) fear of being judged.

Carol, who had always been honest and open with her children's teachers and had tried to convince other mothers/carers to do likewise, believed it was class-related and that the reasons for not telling teachers could be condensed into four words - 'a lot of ignorance'.

People have this opinion that teachers, doctors... that they're all different, you know what I mean? I mean, teachers, doctors can go through the same thing as anyone else.

She stated that a lot of mothers she knew were unwilling to tell teachers because they perceived them as being of little use when it came to lending support. For example, while speaking to a woman who was hoping her husband would be released for her daughter's First Communion, Carol offered to work with her and the child's teachers to put forward an application for temporary release. The second woman (who was not amongst my interviewees) reportedly replied, 'Oh, I didn't fuckin' say anythin' [to the teachers; I] wouldn't open my mouth to them'. However, after hearing of the support Carol had been given by teachers, the second woman agreed to inform her daughter's teacher and ask for her assistance. With help from the teacher, Carol and a prison chaplain, the woman completed the application and the girl's father was released from prison for a few days in order to attend her First Communion. The woman later acknowledged that her impression of teachers had been inaccurate. The fact that the children themselves were not aware of their fathers' imprisonment was another deterrent to telling teachers. As Mary put it, 'if the people don't tell their children, the way they look at it, they've no business telling the teachers or the [other] kids'.

8.4.3.2 Reasons for telling teachers/school

On the other hand, some parents were very open with teachers and/or schools. For example, Mary claimed she had told teachers 'everything from day one' and Fred stated, 'They know exactly where I am, what I'm in here for and how long I'm going to be here'. These parents considered teachers to be people who were approachable and supportive, whether that be in the form of helping children in an academic sense or being supportive of the family more generally (for example, by writing character references for fathers). When parents had positive perceptions of teachers or principals, they were more likely to engage with them. When the principal of

Monica's daughter's school came out to the school yard to chat to the mothers, Monica was prompted to tell her that her daughter had been upset on Father's Day because the other children in her class had been bringing home cards for their fathers and she was not going to be able to deliver her card on time. Monica said of the principal, 'she was lovely... I think that's why I went to her - she was young and she was nice' and this resulted in the strengthening of the child's support system. In another case, Carol worked with her child's teacher to monitor the child's emotional state: '[Name of daughter] didn't know this. We were kind of watching her and helping her'.

Most parents who decided to inform the school did so in order to equip the teachers with the knowledge so that they may help them or their children. Many wanted additional support for their children. Such support was seen by some to be particularly vital while court proceedings were underway, when media coverage of trials could very quickly bring a father's crime and impending imprisonment to public attention and potentially affect how children were viewed/treated. Carol stated, 'when the child goes in the door of the school, if the teachers don't know the problem, they can't help them'. She added: 'I know loads of people that read the school. They say, "They're no help". But... [the teachers simply] don't know'.

Other parents notified the school so that the principal or teachers could assist the parents themselves. For example, some requested assistance in concealing the truth about a father's whereabouts; the mother of a boy in Tracy's class spoke to the principal on the phone to tell him that her children did not know anything about their father's imprisonment (despite the case being highly publicised in the media) and that both parents had decided that they did not want the children to find out. As mentioned previously, others wanted teachers to support applications for their partners' temporary or early release. Melissa received an anonymous letter from a person claiming to be a parent who had children in her son's class, saying that he/she had 'found out who [her son]'s father was and that they were going to go to the Board of [Management] and demand that [her son be] removed out of the school' because he/she believed his father was associated with gangs and did not feel that his/her children were safe. Melissa had been reluctant to speak to the school

principal about the family's circumstances because she was afraid he would look at her and her son differently, but was so concerned about the letter that she did so: 'I was worried. I was *really* worried, like. I was kind of thinking, "Are they going to get... [a] little vigilante group together?"... You do be [sic] thinking all these crazy things'. The principal proceeded to put her mind at rest (see section 8.4.3.3).

Melanie, afraid that the sudden absence of her partner would raise questions about their relationship and possibly have an impact on teachers' perceptions of the family unit, told a teacher (whom she knew since her own childhood) at her child's Montessori school so that teachers would not think she had separated from her partner. Finally, Fred's reason for telling teachers was that he simply did not want to complicate matters: 'What's the use of lyin' or tryin' to twist somethin'?'.

8.4.3.3 Outcomes of teachers having been informed

Despite hesitation in some cases, not one parent interviewed reported any negative outcomes of schools having been informed of the situation, although Fred spoke of 'one or two problems where a teacher was concerned'. He did not wish to elaborate on this but it did not appear that it was linked to his incarceration or to teachers' knowledge of his incarceration. The majority of parents claimed that there had been positive outcomes of having informed teachers of families' circumstances.

The most commonly reported advantage of being open and honest with schools/teachers was that teachers were then in a position to give their child additional support. Nine of the 11 parents interviewed stated that teachers (and schools, more generally) had been supportive or very supportive towards their children and considered the fact that they had been honest and open with schools to be a crucial element in this regard. For example, Carol said the teachers in her child's school were 'fantastic... They went out of their way... if [the children] needed anything, any help'. She was under the impression that teachers had treated her children a lot better because they were always aware of what was happening. She stated: 'The system has done the kids well, but it's because the system knew what was going on with them'.

Melanie agreed that it was helpful when teachers were aware of a father's imprisonment:

I think it's better that they know because then they can actually understand a bit, like, and they can watch out for her [her daughter] in there if she's saying anything about it or anything; they'll prob'ly try help her a bit, like.

Stacey claimed that one mother, who had been open and honest with teachers, felt able (as a result) to ask a teacher to watch out for her child. Mary pointed out that there are advantages of telling teachers, even if children do not know the whereabouts of their fathers:

If you don't tell the kids and people inside in the school do, they're saying it to the kids. The teachers didn't know so what can the teachers do about it?... They're not warned.

She also highlighted the role teachers could play when it came to early intervention where bullying was concerned: '[At] least if the kids are getting bullied [the teachers] can nip it... on [sic] the bud'. Overall, parents were of a view that teachers made more of an effort, were nice to the children and 'treated them a lot better because they knew what was going on' (Carol).

Teachers also spoke about the advantages of being kept informed when attempting to support children. Tara mentioned the importance of knowing when to pay particular attention to children's wellbeing, while Tom said that knowing about a father's imprisonment meant that he was then able to treat children with a little more compassion. Stacey pointed out that it was easier when families told school staff and that, in her experience, teachers respected the confidential nature of the information. This was a point also raised by Tara, who stated that school staff were informed of fathers' imprisonment on a 'need to know' basis only. The ways in which teachers supported children are explored in section 8.5 – *Children's relationships and interactions with teachers*.

Some mothers felt that teachers' support extended to them and not just their children. For example, Mary said she was glad she had told the teachers because she needed to pay for her son's school books in instalments and, as a result of her

openness, felt able to tell teachers that she was finding the situation/her circumstances very difficult in a financial sense. She also reported that sharing information with teachers meant they were able to support her in trying to have her partner released early. The principal wrote a character reference to the governor of the prison where the father was, saying that the father engaged with the school and explaining how he did so (ie, he helped out in relation to extracurricular activities in the school).

Melissa was relieved to find the school principal so supportive when she approached him about the anonymous letter she had received (as discussed previously [see section 8.4.3.2]). He put her mind at rest, explaining that he would 'never entertain something like that', especially from a person who did not have the courage to put his/her name to such a letter and reassured her that her son was 'a lovely child' and that nothing bad was going to happen. Parents also spoke about teachers who had been informed of the situation being more understanding if children were late for school, did not have the correct school uniform or did not have homework done around the time of the initial imprisonment. Many attributed this to being honest and open with the school.

8.4.3.4 Disadvantages (or advantages) of not telling

In keeping with the perceived advantages of informing schools, the main disadvantage of not telling teachers/schools about a father's incarceration reported by participants was teachers were not then in a position to support their children. As Monica put it: 'At the beginning, when I didn't tell the school, maybe they weren't supported enough in school'. Despite all the teachers to whom I spoke (obviously) being aware of fathers' incarceration, it would appear that many were not *kept* informed of important information. For example, some, such as Teresa, were unaware what the children had been told about the crime or what reason they had been given for the father's absence. Tracy, who thought communication between home and school was a 'key' factor and needed to be strong, found it very difficult to support the child in her class because she was completely unaware of how much he knew and felt unable to contact the boy's mother because she felt the woman had 'enough on her plate'. She explained: '[the boy's mother] was very emotional and

she was raw and it just wasn't a place I could go... I found that hard for myself, that I couldn't have a little bit more contact'. As a result, Tracy felt she could not say anything to the child and was forced, as she put it, to 'bring him along as best as [she] could'. On the other hand, a small number of mothers/carers took great care to ensure that teachers were kept abreast of new developments. For example, Carol stated: 'Every time something changed I went to the school'.

8.5 Children's relationships and interactions with teachers

8.5.1 Overall relationships

According to Thelma, a child's relationship with his/her teacher is crucial: 'If you don't have a good relationship with the teacher, everything else is going to collapse'. The vast majority of the children discussed during interviews appeared to enjoy quite happy relationships with their teachers. All the mothers/carers and half the fathers interviewed stated that their children got on well with their teachers or, in cases where schools had been informed, referred to the supportive role that teachers (and/or other members of school staff) had played in their children's lives. However, Fergal said that his child was afraid of the head of the Montessori school, Fred reported minor problems with individual teachers and Fintan explained that his son, who had previously enjoyed a good relationship with his teachers, had been very disruptive after his father had been imprisoned and had taken to 'knocking kids out... - other kids... and teachers'. Tess, who described a boy in her class as 'blank' in many ways, did not believe that he *disliked* teachers, but thought he viewed them in the same manner in which he viewed all the other children in his class, aside from his best friend – they were 'just other people'. She said:

I don't think he realises that they're people... that'll mind [ie, look after] you and that will be there for you.... We're just people. We're setting rules. He's to follow them... but we're not his best buddy.

Teachers generally appeared to care very much about these children and spoke about them with genuine concern and sensitivity to their situations. Tracy spoke about her desire to 'nurture' a boy in her class and ensure that he received 'extra good care' and 'as much love as possible'. She referred to his 'sad days' when the boy would bring in a picture of himself with his father and leave it on his desk for

the day. Tracy knew that she needed to pay particular attention to him on those days. Some teachers had demonstrated their concern for and interest in helping these children by actively pursuing official support for them and Thelma was very passionate in her disappointment in government policy (or lack thereof) with regard to these children.

Teachers reported regularly worrying about children and, in particular, their futures. For example, Thelma stated:

It breaks our heart every year... [to] send Sixth Class off [to secondary school] and we're like, 'Yeah, he'll be gone, he'll be gone, he'll be gone' because they don't have to handle them [emphasis added]. They can expel [children] so they just get rid of them... - that's a killer.

And it would appear that some felt quite protective of the children in their care and intent on helping them to blend in with their peers. For example, Teresa reported providing school uniforms so such children did not stand out as much because she believed that, at their age and in their situation, standing out was not considered to be wise and Tracy was 'ragin' '⁷⁹ after a child was informed of his father's whereabouts by two other children in the class when she was on leave for a day. Although she said the incident had been dealt with promptly and confidentially ('under the radar') by other staff members, she stated that she wished she had been present for the revelation and that, due to the strength of her bond with the child, she found it very difficult even to 'stomach [ie, tolerate]' the children who had inconsiderately blurted out the truth for some time afterwards. Tess explained that the boy in her class was put with his best friend on purpose as teachers thought he would have been 'a little bit lost', had they been separated. And Tracy, who stated that she had assumed a protective role insofar as a child was concerned, said that passing him on to the next teacher would be difficult.

Teachers appeared to be very perceptive with regard to upheaval in children's lives. For example, Carol reported teachers already being aware that there had been a change or that something had happened when she approached the school to inform them that her children's mother had re-entered their lives. As a mother, Sarah said

⁷⁹ Raging: an idiom for expressing extreme anger, annoyance or disgust.

of a teacher, 'She would see things that I wouldn't see' and Flynn stated that teachers would 'prob'ly pick up on' things relating to his children's emotional wellbeing more so than he or their mother would because he was not there and the children might be inclined to hide things from their mother out of concern for her.

Some teachers commended children's resilience and said they were impressed, at times, that children were managing to function at all, given the amount of upheaval with which they had to contend. As Tess put it:

he has a lot to deal with in his little head and sometimes I wonder, 'How are you not exploding?' because... I would hear stuff... that's happening apart from his father... he's obviously relatively good at managing his feelings under the circumstances [original emphasis].

Tess reported being surprised sometimes when a child's homework was done, especially because his home situation would not have been easy. There was a general consensus that children were, as Tara put it, 'minded a bit better' by teachers (when teachers were aware of their situations) and that teachers tried to put their names forward for pleasant experiences, such as swimming lessons. Tracy, referring to a boy in her class, stated: 'We certainly look out for him probably more than you'd look out for anybody else'. And Flynn said that he had noticed one or two teachers making 'that bit more of an effort... if they're nice and they understand and they realise' and that some teachers attempted to 'reach out to them, knowing that they prob'ly haven't got that extra little bit of support that they prob'ly miss'.

Teachers' and other professionals' accounts seemed to suggest that teachers' personalities and experiences occasionally had an impact on their treatment of these children, or at least the level of sympathy with which they treated children. For example, Tara said that teachers' reactions to paternal incarceration depended somewhat on the personality of the teacher and the level of understanding or sympathy he/she had, stating that one or two teachers whom she had informed of fathers' incarceration had said things like, 'Yeah, so why ya telling me?... That doesn't make any difference. I need them still to do x, y and z' or, if they had particularly difficult classes, 'Add it to the list of the seven other kids I'm dealing with'. Having said this, such reactions appeared to be rare, although Stacey claimed to have

encountered some teachers who resented children of criminals or even, in one instance, appeared to have a 'vendetta' against them, describing a case involving a teacher who did not understand a boy's situation and gave him 'a hard time'. She surmised that this may have been caused by the teacher's own prejudices, pointing out: 'You see, remember, every adult: teacher, therapist, mother, father, whatever, comes to the children with their loads of stuff on board. And we all have agendas'. Nevertheless, she met with this teacher and appealed to the teacher's 'better nature', telling her:

Whatever your prejudices are, or whatever you think of prison and criminals, leave it outside. This is a child, a very vulnerable child, [a child] that needs your help, needs your guidance, doesn't need you to be rejecting [him, but rather] needs [you] to understand.

After they 'broke down the barriers', Stacey stated that the teacher really started to engage with the child and her support had a notable effect on the child's adjustment. In contrast to this account, Thelma explained why she believed teachers did not treat children with imprisoned fathers differently:

teachers would never have a stigma towards someone who's in prison or towards their children because that's not our job; our job is... between nine and three and prison is not part of our nine to... three... existence. [A father's incarceration] causes problems for us; it comes up in conversation. But we would never treat a child differently because their dad's in prison - that's not their fault.

8.5.2 Children's openness and honesty with teachers

It would appear that children's relationships with teachers also varied with regard to how open and trusting children themselves were. At one end of the spectrum, Tracy described a very close relationship with a boy in her class, who treated her as a confidante and trusted her to protect his secret. She stated: 'He really will *talk* about it to me [original emphasis]'. Thelma stated that the children she had encountered would generally have been very open with teachers about their fathers' imprisonment (and crime) as they saw 'no shame' in it: 'They'll tell you quite openly, "My father's gone in [to prison] 'cause he drove a get-away car for so-and-so" '. And Flynn and Frank explained that their children had opened up and confided in their teachers about their incarceration. At the other end of the spectrum, seven

professionals reported children being quite secretive, 'on guard' or otherwise unwilling to open up to teachers, although some did say that children liked to speak about their fathers in school, but refrained from mentioning where he was. For example, Teresa spoke of children saying, 'I'm going to see my dad' and then looking at her conspiratorially and Tess said of a boy in her class: 'he might make reference to him, going "Oh, me da [sic] bought me that before" or "Me da [sic] has that", but he would never say outright where his dad is'. Occasionally, even when children *knew* teachers were aware of their fathers' imprisonment, they continued to remain tight-lipped. In one instance, a teacher who had been accompanying Sarah on a prison visit encountered a boy in her class at the prison. As Sarah stated: 'he saluted [his teacher] and she saluted him back... [but] there was nothing *ever, ever* said about that visit, or that he met her or why he met her – nothing [original emphasis]'.

8.5.2.1 Reasons for children's secrecy

Professionals' accounts suggested three reasons for children's secrecy. First, some believed that children were suspicious of teachers' involvement. For example, Teresa explained that the children in her care were afraid to let people in positions such as hers know what was going on in the family home because they were afraid of the possible outcome - that Social Services would be called and they would be removed from their mother's care (again). As a result, the prospect of speaking to teachers was a scary one for some children and one that they considered to have potentially serious repercussions: 'Dad's gone. What happens if I say something and mam goes [too]?'.

Second, some children were reportedly fearful of teachers' perceptions of them changing. For example, Barry was afraid that his teachers would find out about his father's imprisonment and, in a written account, said that he feared they 'would think I was stupid and [that] I couldn't learn because it would affect me at learning [sic]', concluding that: 'it's safe while they don't know'. He wrote: 'If my teacher found out... about this, I really would not be able to live. I'd rather die'. Barry was particularly nervous when leaving the school to visit his father:

I'd be afraid they [would] find out, teachers or whatever, that I'm leaving school to go to see him. And I'm really scared of that. If they find that out I couldn't go back to school ever again, ever.

Third, as previously mentioned, children can sometimes have been warned by parents to keep a father's imprisonment a secret. As Thelma put it, 'mothers would have told them not to [tell anybody]. The boys'd tell you anything [otherwise]'. Monica claimed that some other mothers she knew had warned their children not to speak of their fathers' incarceration and she explained that this put a lot of unnecessary pressure on children. Indeed, Teresa and Stacey spoke about children in this situation, describing (respectively) the big 'load' or 'weight' they appeared to be carrying. Teresa explained that their attempts to keep their father's imprisonment a secret resulted in them having nowhere to 'park' this '*huge*, huge worry [original emphasis]'. Tara stated that some children were particularly well-versed on what they could and could not tell people at school.

8.5.2.2 Outcomes of children's secrecy

As previously discussed, it is impossible for teachers to provide any specific support when they do not know about fathers' incarceration. As Carol pointed out, 'when the child goes in the door of the school, if the teachers don't know the problem, they can't help them'. And similarly, when teachers were aware of the situation but had not been informed by parents or children, they felt they could not broach the topic. For example, Sarah spoke of a teacher who knew about a father's imprisonment and whose student was showing signs of stress but felt unable to broach the topic and did not know what to do with the information. Incidentally, the teacher was so upset by her student's difficult situation (and the fact that she had been dealing with it by herself) that she started to volunteer with a support group for prisoners and their families and Sarah stated:

She now meets the child every week for a chat and a cup of tea or a cup of coffee [in the prison's visitors' area]. Plus she's met other children she knows from the school and they now come up and they talk to her in the prison unit.

Even when teachers knew that children were aware of their fathers' whereabouts, they were not always sure of *how much* they knew. Tracy, who was attempting to support a young boy, stated that this was the reason she had to let all of the information pertaining to his father's imprisonment 'come from him'.

Of course the added strain of attempting to keep a father's incarceration secret could have repercussions for children's behaviour. For instance, a boy who was said to have been well-behaved spoke to Stacey about the effect he feared his secrecy might have on his behaviour at school. He was worried about getting into trouble and reportedly said, 'If I was angry, I might give cheek or I might be bold in class... but... [it] might be because I'm scared of being found out'. And, as will be discussed in the section pertaining to children's relationships with peers (8.6), avoidance of circumstances in which the truth might (accidentally) be revealed may prompt children's withdrawal from certain settings and result in the loss of what might have been valuable and supportive relationships.

8.5.3 Supporting children

Most of the children discussed in this research were lucky enough to receive considerable support from teachers and other members of school staff. Sometimes this involved teachers doing something differently, such as in the case of Monica's daughter, who had been upset about the Father's Day card; the teachers in her school proceeded to make cards a week earlier in subsequent years, so that the child could bring or post her card to the prison. Often, it meant teachers taking on additional duties. For example, Thelma explained, when the class had made Christmas or Father's Day cards, that a lot of children would ask her to post them to the prison because they knew they could depend on her to do it, as she said, that 'it would go for definite if I posted it, whereas mammy, with the best will in the world,... could forget'. Aside from these things and schools/teachers providing children with essentials such as meals⁸⁰ and, in one case, even a duvet,⁸¹ the main types of support mentioned in the research were emotional support, behavioural support, academic support and support in terms of sourcing or accessing additional services; each of these is discussed below.

⁸⁰ Children discussed in this research often attended breakfast clubs or were involved in lunch schemes which provided meals. Such initiatives are most common in areas deemed to be disadvantaged.

⁸¹ On a home visit one HSCL teacher found that a child had no duvet during a particularly harsh winter and promptly provided (a relatively new but fake-tan-stained) one that had been destined for the local charity shop.

8.5.3.1 Emotional support

The main type of support discussed by participants concerned children's emotional adjustment/wellbeing. Aside from some teachers acting as confidantes for children, there was evidence that teachers sometimes assumed counsellor-like roles. For example, teachers spoke about exploring emotional literacy, encouraging children to verbalise their feelings and discussing how children might deal with negative comments by peers or cope on bad days in the future. There was an overall sense that such work gave children ideas in relation to how they could express themselves without resorting to behavioural outbursts. Tracy outlined how she calmed an anxious boy by sorting his worries: 'that isn't your worry... that's for your mum, that's for your dad... You are the child. That's not your worry'. Tess spoke of making herself available so that a boy in her class (who appeared very reluctant to open up to anybody) would know that he could talk to her if he ever felt inclined to do so. And Monica spoke of an especially kind teacher, saying that she would:

always ask... if we were going on a visit to let her know beforehand... in case... [the little girl] was upset or anything afterwards when she came back to school... [so] that she could even ask her, 'How was the visit?' and things like that... That was good.

Thelma likened her role to that of a psychologist, stating:

I had to nearly become a psychologist in... our school because kids come down to you... so upset or not upset... [original emphasis] They said they weren't upset but yet they were overturning tables... you know that kind of thing?... It was anger but they couldn't even recognise it as anger... They thought... 'Dad's gone to prison. It's grand'. But it actually wasn't grand... There's that dual psyche thing going on all the time because they don't know how to talk about things or express things and [they try to convince themselves]... that it's okay and that it's fine... It's like, 'I'm going to miss him. How do I cope with missing someone?'

Teachers reported utilising a number of specific strategies to provide support on an emotional level to (all of the children in their classes, but especially) those children who were coming to terms with their fathers being imprisoned. Many of the strategies used by teachers were whole-school strategies, for example, the

Incredible Years Programme⁸² (incorporating the Dina School Programme for children), emotional literacy training and the *FRIENDS for Life* programme.⁸³ They went on to describe strategies they had developed and used with the children in their own classes.

Some explained that those children experiencing paternal incarceration were to the forefront of their minds in developing these strategies or planning these activities. For example, Tracy, who had a personal interest in the concept of mindfulness, introduced a Worry Buddy to the class and used Mind Jars as well as the book - *The Huge bag of Worries*⁸⁴ by Virginia Ironside. She stated that a lot of the strategies she had implemented were 'geared towards' the boy in her class whose father had been imprisoned and that she had actually made a mini version of the Worry Buddy for that particular child to bring home 'to settle his head'. Tracy felt that, if this boy were able to express himself on paper, he would be able to come to terms with his circumstances and so, to encourage him to do so, surreptitiously organised for him to win a diary with invisible ink pens in a class raffle. Having contacted the boy's mother in order to obtain permission to do so, she also designed a six-week programme especially for him and, with the help of other staff members, made herself available to engage in some one-on-one activities with the boy. During this programme, the boy explored his emotions and his own strengths and weaknesses, using affirmations and 'positive little thoughts' and he put the names of people he could trust in a trust flower. Tracy worked with him in enhancing his coping skills and they identified ways in which he could express his feelings in the future. They created a Vision Board and a scrapbook and wrote letters to the boy (to be opened in the future), all of which Tracy hoped he would return to during the following years

⁸² The Incredible Years programme is designed to prevent and treat emotional and behavioural difficulties in children aged three to 10 (Archways, 2017).

⁸³ The *FRIENDS for Life* programme is a resilience building programme developed by Dr. Paula Barrett in Australia. Aimed at children between the ages of eight and 11, it has been recognised by the World Health Organisation as an effective means by which to tackle the issue of child anxiety (Friends Resilience, 2017).

⁸⁴ *The Huge Bag of Worries* is a book by popular author Virginia Ironside. It tells the story of Jenny, who worries so much that she accumulates a 'huge bag of worries' that follows her everywhere. When it all begins to get too much for her, she serendipitously meets an old woman who kindly sorts out her worries and Jenny finds that she has very little about which to worry after all (Ironside, 1996).

to help 'carry him through' the more difficult times. They also read stories and books such as *The Butterfly Struggle*⁸⁵ and *The Invisible String*⁸⁶ and talked about how the stories might apply to the boy's own life. Follow-up activities were given to the child to do at home with his mother, who was reportedly very supportive and appreciative of Tracy's efforts. It is important to note two things about this case. First, imprisonment was not a common experience in the area and the children in this family, it seemed, were the only children in the school who had a father in prison at the time. Second, none of this would have been possible had the boy's mother not informed the school and remained in contact with teachers after the father's incarceration.

8.5.3.2 Behavioural support

As discussed in the previous chapter, many children exhibited various forms of behavioural reactions to their fathers' incarceration, ranging from complete withdrawal to considerable aggression and some children were simply demanding of teachers' attention in general. Given that behavioural outcomes were often considered to be a 'knock-on' effect of underlying emotional issues (Teresa), the strategies described above were generally believed to treat the cause (ie, the emotional difficulties experienced by a child) as opposed to the symptom (ie, inappropriate or worrying behaviour on the part of the child). But there was also support that was specifically designed to encourage positive behaviour given to children. For example, teachers referred to whole school strategies such as incentive schemes (in which children could earn points that would allow them to have Golden Time⁸⁷ or to go on trips away), an overall 'restorative' staff outlook on

⁸⁵ The Butterfly Struggle is a story about a young boy who sees a butterfly struggling to emerge from its cocoon. In an attempt to assist the butterfly he cuts it out of its cocoon. Unfortunately, the butterfly's development is stunted by this apparent act of kindness and its wings never become strong enough to enable it to fly. The moral of the story is simple: in the same way as a butterfly's struggle is an important stage in its development, our struggles make us stronger and are a necessary part of our growth experience. Numerous versions of this story are available online, but their origin seems obscure. I have relied on the specific version provided by Gauraw (2012), which can be found at <http://www.gauraw.com/story-of-a-butterfly/> [accessed September 21, 2016].

⁸⁶ The Invisible String is a children's book by Patrice Karst. It addresses the issues of loss and separation, reassuring children that, even though their loved ones may be absent, they are forever connected to them by an invisible string, along which their love travels when they are missing each other (Karst, 2000).

⁸⁷ A common practice in Irish primary schools amounting to free time for reading, play, etc.

behavioural issues (Tom) and the provision of a space within the school (or individual teachers) to which (or whom) children were sent after a behavioural outburst. Thelma described a 'lovely' room with beanbags and music where children could sit and calm down after such an outburst before discussing the incident with her and then going back to apologise to the offended party. She explained that school staff would always put support systems in place if they knew a father was going to prison; this might simply involve a teacher making him/herself available in case a child had a behavioural outburst. Tom spoke about a child having his own personalised code of behaviour, which allowed him a ten-minute cooling off period after an outburst or a refusal to cooperate. If the challenging behaviour continued, his mother was contacted and the boy was sent home for the rest of the day.

8.5.3.3 Academic support

Academic support was the form least mentioned as having been offered to children of incarcerated fathers. Thelma attempted to explain why this was so, suggesting that behavioural issues overshadow problems of an academic nature: 'If someone's father was going down [ie, to prison], we would be watching more for behaviour, I'd have to say, than for academics'. Having said this, several participants referred to children being offered places in homework clubs as a means of supporting them academically, while also serving to relieve some of the pressure on mothers/carers. As Tara put it: 'They would be the kind of kids that we would pick up for Homework Club... We'd... get them into homework club so homework isn't really an issue'. Sarah referred to another child who previously rarely, if ever, had homework done; he was offered dedicated time with a HCSL teacher, who helped him with his homework each day in a one-to-one setting. And some teachers talked about very practical lessons, designed to boost motivation. For example, Thelma spoke of teaching a Mathematics lesson about area while planting bulbs in the school garden.

Interestingly, support was not mentioned in relation to children's academic endeavours as often as the making of allowances. For example, Tara spoke about being more lenient if homework was not done in the week around the fathers' imprisonment or release and Frank (although deviating slightly from the focus of

this study) mentioned that his teenage son (in secondary school) had been given ‘a little pass’ shortly after his father’s imprisonment: ‘His results weren’t great but they told him that they understand why’. However, Frank was concerned about the support his children had received, stating that he did not want them to be ‘mollycoddled’ or to get a false sense of achievement due to teachers’ awareness of the situation and resultant kindness. But Tara was anxious to point out that being lenient did not mean that teachers would lower their expectations in any way and pointed out that ‘allowances’ was not the most appropriate word and that any leeway that was given was temporary in nature. She said that it was more to do with providing ‘equal opportunities [in the hope of children achieving] equal outcomes’ and teachers asking themselves: ‘What’s going on around this at the moment and what can [we] do to help?’. She explained that, like children from minority groups (such as those in the Travelling Community), these children needed additional support in order to accomplish results similar to their peers: ‘we still expect them to achieve the same as the other kids but to achieve the same, you have to support them a lot more’. Tara stated that it was important that fathers’ imprisonment did not become an excuse for not succeeding or achieving something, as that would serve to ‘let parents off the hook *completely* [original emphasis]’ and would not adequately prepare children for the future. As she put it, ‘life doesn’t make excuses for you’.

8.5.3.4 Sourcing additional supports

In some cases, teachers who had been informed of families’ circumstances were able to identify or obtain external support services for children or make additional supports available to children in the school. For example, Tara spoke of referring children (and their families) to the local Barnardos service centre and, in Monica’s case, her openness resulted in a dialogue being initiated, the result of which was that the principal enrolled the child in the school’s Rainbows programme. Tara mentioned providing some one-to-one time with a project worker, particularly if the child was displaying, for example, anger and, as previously mentioned, Tracy developed her own scheme of work for a child who was trying to come to terms with his father’s imprisonment.

8.6 Children's relationships and interactions with peers

8.6.1 Changes in children's friendships

Seven of the 11 parents interviewed stated that their children had been friendly with the same children throughout their school lives. Two were not sure if their children still played with the same children; Fred stated that his 'missus' would be the only one who would know that, while Melanie declared that she did not know what happened in school but did not believe her daughter would have been treated differently by peers. Carol pointed out that moving to a new home gave her grandchildren an opportunity to make new friends in a new area. She reported that only one of her four grandchildren actually did so, however, with three of the four choosing to continue their relationships with friends in their previous home area instead. She stated that the boy who embraced all of the changes related to his new circumstances, including the opportunity to make new friends, had fared better.

Four of the six teachers, similarly, reported that children generally played with the same friends prior to and following fathers' incarceration. While some of these children were said to have no 'one specific friend' (Tracy), others had a few close friends and one was described as socially sticking or 'latching' on to one child who appeared to be his 'idol' (Tess). However, Fintan, who said that his son had continued to play with the same children, went on to explain that the quality of these friendships had deteriorated after his imprisonment as he described how his son, who previously enjoyed happy relationships with his peers, started to display worrying (ie, externalising) behaviour following his father's imprisonment (and mother's suicide) and began 'knocking kids out' and arguing a lot with his friends. And Teresa, who spoke of children being involved in disagreements with other children after their father's imprisonment, went on to say that:

when you tease down through [the cause], it's because the... child is not feeling good [in herself] because she's worrying about 'something else'... and it's the 'something else' that's causing... the problem.

Tara explained that, in her experience, children were more likely to withdraw from their friends rather than experience a complete change or loss of friendships and referred to children being by themselves in the school yard or preferring to walk

around with a Special Needs Assistant during lunch break. Teresa and Stacey also referred to children's withdrawal from or 'guarded' approaches to friendships following fathers' imprisonment. In all cases in which withdrawal was mentioned, it was discussed alongside distrust or children's desires to keep their fathers' imprisonment secret, suggesting that the pressure of keeping the truth concealed might prompt some children to withdraw from interactions in which the truth might be revealed.

Melissa, who received an anonymous letter from a parent of a child in her son's class, felt that he had subsequently been excluded by certain children in and outside of school and was convinced that there was a link: 'Definitely, I seen [sic] a change... after that.... I do think that that's the reason why'. She noticed that her son was not invited to birthday parties of classmates whose parties he had previously attended and that boys who had been to his house on (what have recently become known as) play-dates did not come to his birthday parties after word (seemingly) got out about his father's whereabouts. When her son asked, 'Why did they not come, mammy?' she replied, 'Oh, they're probably busy' and hoped that he did not suspect it had anything to do with his father's incarceration. Similarly, Teresa described how, on two occasions, the younger children in a family decided they would like to have parties to celebrate their birthdays. She said,

I think the older ones would have been... wise enough... not to ask to have birthday parties... They just didn't go there. They knew already... whereas the little ones [thought]... 'I'm six... I want a birthday party', you know, like everyone else.

Teresa went on to explain: 'We've small classes so normally [children] invite everybody. So, out of a class of fifteen or seventeen, maybe two... would come. So... then children know that they're different'. The effect of such rebuffs was that the children no longer had birthday parties. Teresa surmised: 'I think they've just learned and they just don't do it anymore'.

8.6.2 Discussing father's imprisonment with friends

When children are attempting to come to terms with a father's absence, friends are in an ideal position to lend support or even just provide a listening ear. However, eight of the 14 participants who commented on this said they believed their children had not discussed their fathers' imprisonment with their friends or peers. Some interviewees were definite (and simultaneously surprised) that this was the case. For example, as Melissa put it:

You know the way kids, kind of, just blurt things out? [Name of boy] has never told anybody... that his daddy's in jail [original emphasis]. Never. And... I've never said to him, 'Don't tell anybody where your daddy is'... But he's never... said it to anybody.

Others, such as Fintan, were less sure: 'I don't know [if he talks to his friends about it]. I wouldn't think so'. It could be that parents are not always aware of children's confidences. For example, Mary explained that she had not known her daughter had confided in a friend until her daughter was asked directly (in her presence) while filling out a survey prior to a prison-related course.

Sometimes friends can become valuable confidantes. Two participants stated that their children had discussed their fathers' imprisonment with close friends, while a further two said their children had told just one person. Of the latter, Mary's daughter's secret was dutifully kept (the boy 'never told no-one'), while Tracy's student's confidence was betrayed. Tracy explained that the boy's mother had told him he could choose one person to tell; the boy chose his cousin but was later disappointed to discover his cousin had told somebody else.

The remaining two participants described variances between siblings, from those who never spoke about their fathers' incarceration to those who were happy for everyone to know. Monica described her two children's different outlooks; one chose not to speak about her father's whereabouts (even though paternal imprisonment was a common experience for children in her class) and the other, a girl described as outgoing and full of confidence, spoke freely about it. This mother explained that her second daughter in particular would have found it very difficult not to talk or be open about her father's imprisonment, had she been attempting to

keep it a secret, and highlighted the strain children (such as her daughter) could be under in attempting to keep the truth hidden:

Some of the mothers... tell the kids, 'Don't open your mouth in school now in front of anyone'... It's putting a lot of pressure on a child... If a child wants to talk about it, let them talk about it.

8.6.3 New friends in similar circumstances

A shared experience of paternal incarceration was considered, by some participants, to be the impetus responsible for encouraging (new) friendships. Flynn stated: 'His father was in jail as well so they had... an understanding... It's a nice thing for to have them someone that they [can] look [at] and say, "Right, well, look... I'm not that different" '. Similarly, Finbar thought that having a friend who understood the situation might have made things a little easier for his children and that this perceived understanding was the reason his children confided in these other children: 'they... have their people that they're close enough to tell... because their fathers were in prison as well'. Having said this, sometimes this potential feeling of comradery did not result in children confiding in each other. For example, Monica recalled a visit to the local prison during which her daughter saw a classmate visiting her own father. Afterwards, neither child mentioned the encounter.

When she went back to school, I had said, 'Did the little girl say anything to you?'. She said, 'No, none of us mentioned it anymore'. But isn't that sad? [They] kept it a secret and never mentioned it to each other either, until they got older. So I just thought it was very sad the fact that she was hiding this in school from her friends... She must have been still too embarrassed to talk about it to her other friend, even though she was there as well.... [I was] waiting every day for her to say the little one said something - 'Are you going to visit your father?' - no, never.

However, over the years that followed the two girls became closer and, as Monica pointed out, 'actually now they're best friends... Maybe [they] just felt they had a connection or something like that'.

8.6.4 Problems with other peers

Two parents stated that their children were bullied and five participants reported children being 'slagged' by peers or taunted with comments such as, 'Ya haven't got a da' or 'Your father's a jailbird'. A child, who told his parents that other children had been telling him he had no father, pleaded with his father (Fergal) to come home because, as he put it, 'I want my friends to see my daddy'. But such taunts might be underreported as, first, it was evident that children did not always tell their parents about such comments. Indeed, Fergal stated that his daughter would not tell him anything to that effect, even if she was being subjected to negative remarks, while Flynn only realised what was being said to his son when he was released from a previous sentence and decided to surprise his son by collecting him from school. When his son saw him, he immediately turned to one of the other children, saying, 'See, I told ya I had a da'. Flynn was surprised that his son had never told him about any comments prior to that day and claimed that it opened his eyes to the effect his imprisonment could have been having on his son's school life. And, second, even when children informed mothers about such remarks, fathers were not always told. Fred (who was serving a life sentence for murder) speculated why this might be so, at least in his case: 'If something happens out there... she won't always tell me 'cause I'd boil [ie, become highly agitated]'.

On the other hand, two fathers were resolute in their opinions that their children were unlikely to be slagged (mocked) or teased in any way. Finbar simply stated, 'Ah no, they were thrown into kick-boxing when they were young so they were alright for school', while Fred inferred that people would be too afraid (of him) to taunt his children: 'I might be inside in jail but I still got [sic] a long reach'.

Tom considered a boy in his class to be lucky that other children were not aware of his father's imprisonment as he believed his the situation would definitely be grounds for spiteful comments to be directed at the boy. Their ignorance meant that the other children had, as he put it, 'one less stick' with which to beat him.

Sarah pointed out that some children were inclined to use their fathers' imprisonment (and, perhaps, image as a tough man) as a deterrent insofar as bullies were concerned:

if they're being bullied... [they might say things such as] 'Stop bullying me or I'll tell... My father's in jail and he'll kill you when he gets out'... they'll use it that way.

Three participants spoke of children being physically attacked by peers. In one of these cases, Fintan had been imprisoned for murder and his son was in the same school as the murdered man's sons. As Fintan quite simply said, these brothers 'ended up breakin' [ie, beating] him up' (and were subsequently expelled). Two participants claimed that, in their experience, the type of crime committed by a father can have an influence on how his children might be treated by the wider community. To this end, Thelma recalled a 'really lovely boy' whom she had taught receiving beatings from other young children in the neighbourhood. His father had been convicted of what is legally (in the Republic of Ireland) termed 'defilement of [a] child under 15 years of age' (Criminal Law [Sexual Offences] Act, 2006). Thelma had heard rumours that the beating was related to the boy starting to see a girl whose brothers were not keen to allow the relationship to continue. However, she also stated that the father being in prison was another reason 'thrown back and forth' and that it was difficult to pinpoint the real reason. Either way, the boy was called a paedophile, he was told his father was a paedophile and the boy was physically beaten. Admittedly, these attacks had more to do with the crimes committed by fathers than imprisonment itself, but these experiences are important to consider as we try to gain a comprehensive insight into the reality of the (social) lives of children with incarcerated fathers. A third boy was reported to have been frequently punched by other children at school after his father's highly-publicised incarceration and, according to Stacey, 'he was *always* caught punching back [original emphasis]'.

8.6.5 Positive relationships with other peers

Several participants described kind and helpful relationships between children and their peers. Thelma spoke about the children whose fathers were in prison being 'very good to boys [in the school] who had other special needs... more complex mental needs', saying that, despite considerable behavioural problems, they possessed a certain kindness. And in return other children were often very kind to children with incarcerated fathers. For example, Tracy said that, shortly after a boy's father's imprisonment, a teacher in another class was doing a meditation exercise in which children were asked to send positive thoughts to somebody they thought would need them. She asked the children to write letters to the people afterwards and she found a lot of the children wrote a letter to the boy whose father had been incarcerated. In addition to the kindness those children showed in thinking of that boy was the kindness they had demonstrated by not speaking about it. In fact, this activity was, for teachers in the school, the first indication that some of the children knew because, prior to that, nobody had spoken of the event, despite the case being highly publicised in the media.

Sarah described another case in which a group of children went on a school trip to a prison and were allowed into a prison cell to gain a better understanding of what prison life might feel like. While in the cell, a boy spotted a picture of the prisoner with his daughter – a girl who was in the class and also on the trip! Nobody knew her father was in prison and the boy who had seen the photograph spoke to his teacher in confidence, but did not say anything to the other children or the girl herself. Thelma felt that the reactions of children's peers to the incarceration of fathers can be guided by their own parents' opinions of the crime, of its perpetrator and of imprisonment in general. As she was eager to point out, 'Kids don't have stigmas. Parents do and they import them onto the kids... Kids don't have prejudices... They *learn* to comment negatively on people in prison [emphasis added]'.

8.6.6 Not wanting to appear different

Children not wanting to appear different was a theme that arose a few times from the data. Melissa's son was asked at school to make a family tree and decided to put his mother's (live-in) boyfriend's name in the 'Father' space. Melissa believed that this was an attempt to fit in with perceptions of the typical family unit and said, 'he would have just put him in it to be normal' or 'maybe not to feel or look different' in front of the other children at school. Teresa spoke about a family who stood out due to their impoverished situation and believed that they might have been less conspicuous had they been financially more secure or better presented. Unfortunately, as with the children who attempted to have birthday parties similar to those of their peers, reminders of their specific circumstances were often quite frequent and upsetting. For some, having friends in similar circumstances eased the feelings of being a peculiarity. And for one of Carol's grandchildren, the change of carer that occurred as a result of her father's imprisonment meant that she was not going to stand out at school anymore. While living with her mother after her father's imprisonment, she had been somewhat dependent on her classmates' generosity at lunchtime and was, therefore, delighted to be able to bring in extra sandwiches when she moved to her grandmother's house. She told Carol: 'I won't be in the poor corner anymore. I'll be able to share'.

8.6.7 Fears of peers finding out

Four participants described children being fearful, even terrified, of the possibility that other children might find out about their fathers' incarceration. For example, Stacey spoke about Barry who was finding school life very hard because nobody knew about his situation and he was not allowed to tell anyone because his mother was concerned that the story would reach the local media. Barry explained, in a written piece, that the prospect of any of the other children finding out was 'very scary' and, when asked by Stacey what the outcome of that might be, he wrote:

Then they would think I was bad, and then they wouldn't like me and then they would probably bully me and they wouldn't have anything to do with me... It's safe while they don't know.

Barry was one of a number of children discussed in the research who were fearful that other children might suspect where they were going when they left school to visit prisons and, as previously mentioned, some even developed strategies that they felt helped to camouflage their exit. As Tara explained: '[a girl] hated having to get up out of the classroom to leave... it was like, "Yeah, I'm just going to the toilet" '. Stacey stated that some children became paranoid about their secrets being exposed, describing a ten-year-old girl who was 'very withdrawn, very... shaky [and] jumpy' and in constant fear of somebody finding out.

8.6.8 Being informed of father's imprisonment by peers

In two cases, children were informed of their fathers' whereabouts by peers. In both of these instances, the children whose fathers were in prison were extremely upset or even said to be traumatised by the revelation. Frank indicated that such revelations could also be linked to an overall sense of one-upmanship in an area: 'it wouldn't take too long for other kids to mention it to them'.

8.6.9 The influence location/culture has on relationships with peers

Interestingly, a significant number of parents believed that where they lived might influence children's relationships and interactions with peers. For example, Carol, whose children went to school in a 'posh area', surmised: 'Maybe if they went to [Name of a more disadvantaged area] school they wouldn't have been called names because half the... dads and mams were in prison so... it wouldn't have been a big issue'. Her theory appeared to be confirmed by some fathers who stated that the prevalence of imprisoned fathers in their areas of origin meant that it was 'basic'ly the norm' (Flynn) or 'no big drama... to the kids' (Fintan) and certainly not something that would cause children to be bullied. Having said this, Frank felt that the fact that his family lived in an area in which one-parent families were very common meant that there was a certain degree of jealousy towards two-parent families (like his) and that this made it *more likely* that children would be teased or bullied in some way (as was one of his sons).

8.7 Children's/Families' relationships and interactions with extended families

Nine of the 11 parents interviewed said that extended families were very or mostly supportive after fathers had been taken into custody (and the remaining two did not comment). Frank clearly stated that extended family had paid more attention to his children as a result of his imprisonment. Such family members (usually grandmothers, but also aunts, grandfathers and uncles) regularly minded children, dropped them to or collected them from school, brought them to football training, bought school books for them and did homework with them.

Four of the six professionals (including teachers) who commented on familial support mentioned similar forms of support. For example, Tracy said of a pupil:

His dad's side of the family are excellent... I do knitting on a Friday and [both of] his grannies would have come in at different stages... [We had] a Science Fair and... one of his grannies and aunties came in as well... they do give an awful lot of help and... his mum's side of the family... She [the child's mother]'s lucky in that way... She has so much support.

However, some of these positive familial relationships were not always so; Melissa was very honest in admitting:

It wasn't always a good relationship... with me and... his family but a lot of that was my doing... - being hot-headed and shouting and roaring and not seeing... the situation clearly but... now it's brilliant.

She went on to say, 'There was a year or two there where we were all bickering... but... we built bridges, thank God'. And Carol explained that her (non-incarcerated) son, despite being reported to have lost the 'brotherly feeling' with his brother in prison, apparently supported and helped to take care of his nieces and nephews while their father was serving his prison sentence. There was further evidence of extended families being very supportive of and kind to children, even when they were not necessarily on good terms with children's fathers or mothers; Fergal claimed that his sister (with whom he did not see eye to eye) was actually being 'too nice' to his son!

Indeed, extended family members spoiling a child in order to compensate for his father's absence was an issue also raised by Tess:

When he goes to his father's family, they compensate for the fact that the father isn't there. So he's spoiled there... he gets everything he wants.... he gets it because [of] the guilt, I'd say, from that side [of the family]. That's how they compensate.

Two participants mentioned that, in the absence of their fathers, children's extended families provided them with male role models in the form of grandfathers. Interestingly, one of these grandfathers had previously been absent from his grandson's life himself due to his lack of approval of his daughter's partner. According to Tara (the child's teacher), he had previously told his daughter that he would be unavailable if she continued her relationship with her partner, but the imprisonment of his grandson's father resulted in his being 'back on the scene', doing school runs, etc. Tara said,

he's a very positive role model... that particular child... was very close to his dad and had a really good relationship so... he's obviously going to miss that but now, at least, he has his grandad who is just as positive [a role model].

On the other hand, Garrett and Teresa referred to instances in which families received no support from their extended families and were, as a result, very isolated, although one of these cases involved a family that was not originally from the Republic of Ireland and, therefore, had no extended family in the country. This family's status as foreign nationals living in Ireland was, thus, perceived to add 'an extra layer' of difficulty in relation to support (Teresa).

It would appear that, occasionally, families can actually be more of a hindrance than a help. As previously mentioned, Tara spoke of the pressure some fathers' families (especially those from the Travelling Community) put on mothers to get bail money or character references together in order for their partners to be released from prison (either early or temporarily). She stated that, in one case, a mother's life was 'very much watched' by her partner's sisters each time her partner was in prison. This can all have implications for mothers' coping skills.

Fergal, who described a very supportive extended family overall, explained why he felt that some members of his family were not quite as supportive:

Don't get me wrong,... both the families – my family and my partner's family are very supportive. We do have a couple of them, y'know, that like [sigh] don't really care, I mean... my brothers and sisters have looked after [each other's]... kids when they're going away on holidays or... going away for weekends and... not once... through this whole sentence have any of them... [said to my partner] 'Look, if ya wanna go out one of the weekends or if you're going away or anything, we'll take him for a weekend or we'll take him overnight' or anything. None of them have. And things like that hurt me because she has volunteered lots of times... She's took [sic] their kids and... minded houses for weekends.... It's hard [on my son] because, like, [his cousins] are going out to places with their mummies and daddies and sometimes he's left out. He's not going and he's crying... [and] I can't make them bring him.

In two cases, children were fostered or taken in by members of their extended families after their fathers were imprisoned. This was discussed in the previous chapter, in relation to children experiencing a change of carer. However, relationships between mothers/fathers and their children's new carers were not mentioned. While Fintan appeared to enjoy a good relationship with his children's new carer, Carol's relationship with her children's mother was far from harmonious. Nonetheless, as much as she claimed she would have liked to 'get her up against that wall and choke her' (because of her bad/neglectful treatment of her children among other things), Carol was mindful of her grandchildren and the effect her treatment of their mother could have on them: 'at the end of the day, that's the mother and that's the father so you just... bite your tongue'. When the children's mother started to re-enter their lives, Carol felt, despite her true feelings, that she had to cajole the children into maintaining their relationships with her, telling them 'It's your mammy and mammy loves ye'. As she stated, 'You do it for a child'.

8.8 Relationships and interactions between fathers and mothers/carers

According to the data, most parents who were still together enjoyed close relationships. Melanie, in particular, seemed completely preoccupied with her husband's feelings about missing out on his children's lives, especially, for example, at Christmas or on their children's birthdays. She talked about her partner being

absent when their son took his first steps and when their daughter got her back teeth, saying: 'That's something that you'll never get back again'. In fathers' accounts there was an overall feeling of respect for or appreciation of mothers and their apparently tireless efforts insofar as the rearing of their children was concerned. As Flynn put it, 'they're actually... very good kids... I can't take credit for that now. It's down to her... because she basically reared them... I've only, like, been a fly on the wall'. Fred pointed out that his partner had 'been mother and father to [their children]... for the last five and a half years'.

There were some references to parents disagreeing with regard to the disciplining of children; in these instances mothers tended to be stricter and fathers were more lenient. For example, Fergal claimed that his partner regularly criticised him for failing to discipline their son and making her 'look like the bad one', but he explained that he usually saw what could be described as the humorous side of what their son had done. Fergal said:

I just laugh and then she tells me... I'm letting him away with it.... I'm not encouraging him but, I mean, how can I give out to him? I'm not there.... She was saying, like, in a lot of households, it's the mother that's supposed to be the good one... it's the father that's supposed to be the bad one for giving out, but it's actually the opposite way around. She gives out to him and then he gets on the phone to me with a sad voice and I'd say.... 'Look, just leave it. Let him'. And then she'd be giving out to me.

Among parents who were separated, some mothers were on good terms with their children's fathers and were determined to ensure their children had good relationships with their fathers. For example, Melissa said her ex-husband would always be her son's father and that she honestly had no desire for it to be otherwise because she knew how much he loved his son and that he was 'the apple of his eye'. Finbar even reported going on holidays with his ex-partner and children for the children's sakes or, as he put it, 'just for the father and mother thing'. Others, although still on relatively good terms or, at least, speaking terms with fathers, were less encouraging but did not prevent their children from going to visit their fathers (with family members or social workers). For example, Tess described a situation in which relations between parents of a boy in her class were not ideal, but 'they made amends somewhat to discuss the child'. And others still did not wish to see or

hear from their ex-partners anymore, had no interest in maintaining the father-child bond and were not prepared to allow their children to visit prisons. For example, Fergal estimated that it had been ten years since he last saw his (twelve-year-old) daughter, as a result of strained relationships since his separation with his partner.

8.9 Relationships and interactions within the local community

Some relationships and interactions with the wider community were reportedly quite positive. For example, most friends and neighbours were said to have been very supportive following the father's removal from the home. Frank, in particular, was very appreciative of the lengths to which his neighbour had gone to amuse and include his son:

He brings him everywhere with him... whenever he's taking his son somewhere, he'll knock in and he'll say, 'I'll take [Name of son]'... that is a great help.... he's brilliant.

However, as Monica pointed out, 'if you're not in that [kind of supportive] circle and you're in a different circle', there can be ramifications in relation to how both children and mothers/carers cope with the imprisonment of fathers.

And there was some evidence in the data of people being considerably less supportive. A prime example of this was Melissa, who received an anonymous letter demanding that her son be removed from the local school. She explained how she, as a direct result of receiving this letter, distanced herself from or did not encourage friendships with other children's parents at the school as she believed that their perception of her was that of a 'scumbag' or a drug-addict, 'at home with a needle hangin' out of her arm'. She admitted that this sounded bizarre (and, speaking to her, it truly did), but she explained that the letter had stated that the sender no longer felt that his/her children were safe at school and Melissa believed he/she thought gangs were going to 'shoot up the school', which to her sounded just as 'fuckin' crazy'. Melissa's main concern, though, was how her son would be perceived: 'I would have been afraid of them saying... "He's going to be a little brat and he comes from this kind of a family" ' or 'I don't want my child near him' or 'I couldn't let my son go down there [to her house] because God knows what's going

on down there'. And, while she hoped she was being too harsh on herself and over-analysing things, the lower-than-expected turn-out at her son's birthday party seemed to suggest that her suspicions had been at least somewhat founded.

As previously mentioned, there were people in some communities who were only too happy to spread the word (either directly or through their children) of a father's imprisonment. As Thelma said, 'there's only someone dying to come in [to the school] and say, "Wait 'till ya hear... someone's after being put in" '. And Frank claimed that some people would not hesitate even to reveal a father's whereabouts to a child who was unaware of such information. On the other hand, sometimes parents of other children actively tried to keep the knowledge from their own children in an effort to protect the children of imprisoned fathers. Tracy related a story another staff member in her school told her. The staff member had a son in the same class as a boy whose father was being sentenced. Her son:

walked in [to the room] one day and said 'That's [Name of boy]'s dad on the TV'. And she kind of had to brush it under the rug and sort of say 'Aw, no... that's not [Name of boy]'s dad. [It] doesn't look anything like him'.

8.10 Fathers' interactions with the (Irish) justice system

Fathers' interactions with the justice system in Ireland were, perhaps quite obviously, considered to exert an influence over children's lives. The most commonly mentioned issue in this regard was length of sentence and, as a result, the role the legal system played in shaping children's futures. For example, Tracy reported that parents of a boy in her class who had expected a father to receive a two-year sentence had decided to refrain from informing their children of their father's imprisonment, choosing to tell them he was working away. However, the judge had taken into account the views of the victims of the crime – that this man should be 'made an example of' – and, as a result, a sentence of over seven years was imposed. Fintan reflected on the fact that the success or failure of his upcoming appeal would determine whether or not he would ever live with his children again:

By the time I get out..., if it goes wrong for me, all my kids are going to be grown up... I'm looking at eighteen to twenty years... If it goes right, I'll prob'ly only have about another three left.

And Sarah was incredulous that a judge ordered a man to be imprisoned the day before his child's First Communion, when it appeared to her that he could easily have been taken into custody the day after this event and, thus, allowed the child to enjoy his special day. She believed the event had emotionally damaged the boy, particularly because he had mistakenly believed, when he was visiting his father on the day of his Communion, that his father would be leaving the prison and returning home with him; he was distraught to learn otherwise.

8.11 Families' interactions with the media

Several participants spoke about media coverage, referring to stories being reported on newspapers (either in print or digital formats), on the television or on social media sites. The media had initially informed some participants (most often teachers) of fathers' crimes or incarceration. For example, Finbar remembered his children asking him, 'Dad, is that you in the paper?'. Teresa and Tracy, referring to high profile crimes, claimed the media was responsible for everybody in the respective towns knowing about the events within a matter of hours. Teresa highlighted how difficult this was for the children as there was then no doubt in their minds that everybody knew. Parents' primary fear with regard to the media was that identifications would be made and children would be penalised in some way. For example, Finbar recalled asking a judge to order that his name be omitted from any reporting of the case because he believed his children would suffer in school if they were identified as his offspring. The threat of such an occurrence was the reason Mary gave for informing her children's school of their father's impending trial, sentencing and imprisonment. She wanted teachers to be warned in case there would be anything said to her children in school that might upset them.

8.12 Families' interactions with support services

Insofar as emotional support services were concerned, four of the 11 parents interviewed spoke of their or their children's involvement with support groups for families of prisoners and therapy or counselling services. Monica's daughter also attended the Rainbows programme in her school. Monica suggested that inability to cope on the part of mothers/carers can result in children not being introduced to support services such as counselling and Carol claimed that a fear of being judged

might deter some families from accessing support services. Carol went on to explain how meeting a staff member who had experienced the incarceration of a family member had put her at ease:

The first day I went in to [Name of support service for prisoners and their families]... it was [Name of staff member] I met and I couldn't get the words out that my son was in prison. And she said... 'My son is in for life'. Straight away the connection was there; she wasn't going to judge me or my son.... and then I felt [sigh of relief]... This is someone I can talk to.

Children can have their own fears in relation to utilising such services. For example, Teresa said that children in her care were very uncooperative when she was trying to encourage them to talk to a professional as they feared being split up or taken into state care again:

they were afraid... if they told [anyone] how they were feeling and how... stressed or worried or whatever it was they were, that somebody would come in and... they'd be... pulled... away from the mom [because] it had happened before.

And Stacey, a therapist, described a case in which a boy was afraid to visit her because he thought she would be based in the local prison and he did not want anybody to discover where he was going. She said:

when he heard he was coming to me first, he questioned his mother. He wanted to come and see... somebody to talk to, but he questioned her upside down: Was I in the prison? Had I anything to do with the prison? What would it be like?... the mother [said], 'He's terrified and I don't know why'. So, I discovered today why - ... he associated going to visit dad in the prison and coming to see me, and [he was worried about] what would happen... if somebody found out.

But when children and their families engaged with such services, the outcomes were reportedly good and generally had a positive impact on children's behaviour in school as well as their emotional states. Many had, as Stacey succinctly put it, 'no more trouble'. Stacey stated that, in her 30 years of experience in the field, children very seldom completed therapy without having accomplished something and/or acquired the skills they needed. And while she admitted that 'a few will go through the process [and] go through the school process and... [still choose to] opt out', she said that, overall, if one engages with children as early as possible and earns their

trust, the benefits can have considerable impacts on these children's lives. Having said this, Carol said that her granddaughter, who never spoke about her father's imprisonment and feigned indifference to it, ceased counselling after just one or two sessions. Carol believed that this was because it was approaching a point at which the counsellor was beginning to penetrate her tough outer shell and she did not want her to 'blow her cover'. Stacey said that, for many children, 'all they want is an ear', but that is not to say that the process is always an easy one and she explained that it is often the emotions these children are suppressing or what they are *not* saying that tell the true story. As she pointed out, it takes a lot of 'brave work' on the part of children to work through their difficulties.

When it came to accessing other public services, Teresa described the difficulty one mother had in applying for the One-Parent Family Payment. Although she claimed this mother received some support in attempting to claim the benefit, the teacher was shocked at 'the amount of resistance the woman met': 'I could not get over... how unhelpful people were'. She surmised that people's negative attitudes towards the woman may have been caused by their knowledge of the crime and the father's subsequent imprisonment: 'maybe they knew the story; it's a small town'. Teresa was of the opinion that there may even have been instances of people delaying proceedings purposefully, something she found appalling as she thought:

this is not for her, this is for her children... this is a life or death situation for these children... they will starve if they don't have food. They don't have money - they don't have food, never mind clothes or any of the rest of it.

Teachers spoke variously of children being taken into care by social services, of families availing of local counselling services and of referring families to charities such as Barnardos and to the (in-school) Rainbows programme.

But the most salient issue raised by teachers was the lack of support services available specifically for children whose fathers had been imprisoned. For example, Teresa (who had tried to access some form of support for the children in her care) was amazed to find so little support available. She said:

I don't think there's anybody... who was there with the children's particular interests [at heart, aside from the school]... As far as Social Services were concerned, that case was closed.... Their only interest... is in immediate danger, life-threatening danger.... Ongoing emotional damage... - that's not their problem. And I understand that but... there was nothing [else available in terms of support].

Thelma pointed out that schools are often the only form of support for these children and their families, a reality that she believed was wrong:

there should be something concrete that if a father goes into prison, agencies get involved with the family. That doesn't happen.... There's no support.... They're just left there and the schools are again left to pick up [the pieces].

Tracy stated that it would have been fantastic for the boy in her class to have had some form of local peer support group so that he could have come to the realisation that he was not the only child in that particular situation and Thelma pointed out, 'you can't break a cycle if you don't put something in the spokes of the wheel to stop it'.

8.13 Conclusion

This chapter explored the effects of having a father in prison on relationships and interactions relating to children's academic lives. Chapter Nine considers the principal findings of this study in light of existing research.

Chapter Nine

Discussion

9.1 Introduction

There was already a growing body of literature relating to children of incarcerated parents in the years preceding 2017. However, at the time of writing the academic lives of these children had attracted little attention. In this research, by means of a multiple case study, which involved data from 21 unstructured and semi-structured interviews, three short (but insightful) pieces of writing by children and a carer, two sets of standardised test results and researcher observations, I attempted to redress this inattention. Before I proceed to discussing my substantive findings, I review the specific aims of the research.

9.2 Revisiting the research objectives/Chapter outline

From its inception, this study had two aims. So that I may provide context for the discussion of the findings of the study, allow me to repeat those aims here. In the first place, I intended to describe and analyse the experiences of children in Ireland who had fathers in prison. The first two research questions addressed this aim and the findings in relation to this aspect of the research are to be found in section one below.

Second, I set out to explore and come to an understanding of how (if at all) these experiences had impacts on children's academic lives. Using data obtained in answer to the third and fourth research questions, section two of this chapter details the main findings relating to this aim.

Section three contains a brief discussion of some of the moderating factors at play. It is important to note that, as a result of the paucity of research on the academic lives of children with incarcerated fathers (or mothers, for that matter), some of the research to which I refer in this chapter has not been cited previously in preceding pages and sometimes relates to studies that are unrelated to paternal (or maternal) incarceration.

SECTION ONE

9.3 Experiences and perceptions of paternal incarceration

I used the data generated from the first two research questions (ie, ‘What are the experiences of pre- and primary-school children in Ireland who have a father in prison?’ and ‘How are these experiences interpreted by children with incarcerated fathers and key members in their lives?’) to address the first aim of this study. I set out to describe and analyse the experiences of children in Ireland who had a father in prison. Chapter Seven provided in-depth descriptions and analyses of these children’s experiences in their individual contexts. What follows is a brief discussion in relation to the overall findings of this aspect of the research, namely that:

- paternal incarceration is an event rarely experienced in isolation;
- the imprisonment of a father is typically perceived in a negative way and difficult to hide from children;
- prison visits (including fathers’ home visits) are often emotionally challenging or distressing for children.

9.3.1 Paternal incarceration - rarely experienced in isolation

Consistent with much of the research that preceded it (see, for example, Phillips et al., 2006; Murray et al., 2012; Nichols & Loper, 2012,⁸⁸ Nichols et al., 2016), this study found that paternal incarceration was most often experienced alongside a range of other forms of upheaval or risk factors. In addition to the incarceration of fathers, children were likely to have experienced one or more of the following forms of disruption to their lives: a change of primary carer or loss of some other family member(s), a move of house, a change of school, parental separation, death of a parent or the witnessing of illegal activities or arrest of a father. These findings are similar to those of, for example, Phillips et al. (2006), Geller et al. (2009), Bocknek et al. (2009); Lopoo and Western (2005); Mackintosh et al. (2006) and Roberts et al. (2014). In 2010 Dallaire and Wilson concluded that children who witnessed crimes committed by, or arrest of, a father were more likely to display maladjustment in

⁸⁸ As previously pointed out, Nichols and Loper’s study relates to adolescents with incarcerated *household members* more generally (2012).

their emotion regulation skills and greater internalising behaviour and there have also been claims that experiencing the arrest of a family member can cause problems in relation to mental health (see, for example, Phillips & Zhao, 2010; Roberts et al., 2014). While the data procured in the current study were not sufficient to either confirm or deny these claims, witnessing or being aware of such events appeared to be a contributing factor to some children's maladjustment.

EXPERIENCE	Perceived as positive	Perceived as negative	TOTAL
Change of carer	0.2	4.8	5
Move of home	1.2	6.8	8
Change of school	-	2	2
Parental bereavement	-	2	2
Parental separation	2	11	13
Loss of other family member(s)	-	2	2
Witnessed arrest	-	1	1
Witnessed crime(s)	-	6	6
TOTAL	3.4	35.6	39
PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL	9%	91%	100%

Table 2 Perceptions of experiences

However, perhaps contrary to what might seem the intuitive view, my work, consistent with findings by Shaw (1992a) and Cho (2009b), revealed instances in which paternal incarceration or experiences related to it (as outlined in Chapter Seven and listed in Table 2) had positive impacts on children's (academic) lives. For example, one of Carol's grandsons responded very well to the stability provided by his new living situation. However, when taken together, 91% of the experiences described in this research were viewed by both adult participants and the children for whom they spoke as leading to negative outcomes for the children concerned (see Table 2). A group of children who were typically already vulnerable by virtue of their fathers being incarcerated had things made worse by an array of other types of upheaval.

This finding (ie, that children of incarcerated fathers are likely to experience several forms of disruption simultaneously) is significant for three reasons. Firstly, from a research perspective, it renders the task of isolating the effects of paternal incarceration and the associated task of determining causation extremely difficult, a point previously noted by researchers such as Phillips et al. (2006), Murray and Farrington (2008a), Johnson and Easterling (2012) and Wildeman, Wakefield and Turney (2013). Having said this, in an attempt to understand *why* these children typically experience such upheaval, a review of the data revealed that 59% of these disruptive experiences were either a direct result of or related to fathers' imprisonment (the latter usually being as a result of the crimes committed) and 13% were unrelated (see Table 3). In 28% of the cases no reason was given or evident. This suggests that paternal incarceration and paternal criminality are the main risk factors at work in the lives of such children.

EXPERIENCE	A direct result of paternal incarceration	Related to paternal incarceration	Not related to paternal incarceration	No reason given	TOTAL
Change of carer	2	3	-	-	5
Move of home	3	3	2	-	8
Change of school	-	1	1	-	2
Parental bereavement	-	2	-	-	2
Parental separation	1	1	-	11	13
Loss of other family member(s)	2	-	-	-	2
Witnessed arrest	-	1	-	-	1
Witnessed crime(s)	-	4	2	-	6
TOTAL	8	15	5	11	39
PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL	21%	38%	13%	28%	100%

Table 3 Apparent reasons for or causes of experiences

Second, from an academic standpoint, this meant that school, for many of the children in this study, was the only constant or stable aspect of their lives. This could be seen to increase its significance and the importance of it remaining so.

Finally, such disruptions could have detrimental consequences for children in an academic sense. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (hereafter HoN; see Figure 4), it is essential that a person's physiological needs, as well as his/her needs insofar as safety, sense of belonging and esteem are concerned, are met in order to achieve self-actualisation (ie, the reaching of one's full potential). In other words (to focus in particular on 'Safety' needs), instability in children's lives such as that described in this research can seriously undermine a child's ability to function to the best of his/her ability.



Figure 4 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (adapted from <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html> in light of Maslow, 1943)

Having said this (and at the risk of diverging from the main issue at hand), Mathes (1981) asserted that 'Safety' and 'Esteem' were unwarranted aspects of this hierarchy and Maslow himself admitted that his hierarchy did not apply to people of all personalities (1943). This *could* explain why some children of incarcerated fathers demonstrate academic resilience, excelling in their educational endeavours despite considerable instability (see, for example, Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008).

Certainly, it was clear from the data that most teachers in this study were of the opinion a child's physical and emotional wellbeing were vital to his/her successful academic functioning, suggesting that Maslow's HoN, even if not entirely accurate, has to some extent permeated public perception. In accordance with this view, teachers often (though not always) gave priority to emotional and behavioural issues over those of an academic nature. In effect, teachers may not always understand what is best for children in such circumstances, but they often work hard to do what they believe to be right and, at least sometimes, they may provide a core of stability that is of benefit. This being said, one cannot deny that there would likely be negative repercussions for children's levels of achievement if academic considerations were overlooked entirely. Although there was little evidence of this being the case in the current research, viewing Maslow's HoN as a fixed series of stages to be completed in order to reach a state in which one is truly capable of learning is something Frame warned against: 'The goal being unreachable, teachers [may] tend to lower their sights and attend only to the lower stages of the hierarchy (security, self-esteem),... thus [diluting] the cognitive content of learning' (1996, p. 13). In other words, it might be foolish to wait for these children's circumstances to be perfect or seemingly conducive to learning, because they most likely will never be so.

9.3.2 Negative perceptions of paternal incarceration

Similar to the findings of numerous other pieces of research (see, for example, Chui, 2016b), the imprisonment of a father was, in this study, routinely shown to be thought of as a negative event by all concerned – fathers (perhaps obviously so), mothers/carers, other professionals dealing with children of incarcerated fathers and the children themselves. Interpretations of parental incarceration as a shameful secret, a sentence for families of offenders, a threat to children's feelings of security and a form of loss synonymous with death correspond with those described previously by, for example, Braman (2002), Allard and Greene (2011), Poehlmann (2005b) and Noble (1995), respectively. As portrayed by participants, the complex feelings experienced by children in response to fathers' imprisonment might be best

described by the Portuguese word *saudade*.⁸⁹ Rough English equivalents might be mournfulness, feeling bereft, nostalgic and the like. Speaking in Irish one could say *cumha*, *éagmais* or *eolchaire*. Capable of simultaneously expressing love and pain, the term is particularly pertinent to the circumstances described here, not least because a stronger form of *saudade* can be felt towards people whose whereabouts are unknown (Clawson, 2009). Indeed, the data significantly suggested that children who had been deceived (or partially deceived) experienced many of the same feelings as those who had not, but their confusion regarding their fathers' whereabouts generally served to intensify their distress and often resulted in their displaying signs of considerable anxiety and even (although admittedly in just a small number of instances) incited feelings of rejection. This would appear to advocate a policy of honesty (it traditionally being deemed best, after all) within families when a father is imprisoned and, in so doing, joins others such as King (2002) and Dallaire et al. (2010). In any case, the data suggested that it was, as researchers such as Poehlmann (2005b) have pointed out, very difficult (or almost impossible) to hide the truth from children, with all seven of the parents who initially deceived their children revealing that those children subsequently found out or were told where their fathers were.

Although some participants claimed that paternal incarceration could have the effect of normalising imprisonment, particularly for younger children, references to children's emotional and behavioural reactions typically contradicted such claims. The fact that the incarceration of fathers was, in the vast majority of cases, seen as a negative event would seem to suggest that, for most children, these men were important figures in their lives and ones with whom they had hitherto enjoyed happy relationships, a conclusion previously reached by Shaw in 1987.

⁸⁹ *Saudade*, a word of Portuguese origin, was listed as the seventh most difficult word to translate in 2007 (Kelly, 2007). The *Pequeno dicionário brasileiro da língua Portuguesa* [Little Brazilian dictionary of the Portuguese language] defined *saudade* as a 'sad and understated remembrance of persons or things which are distant or lost accompanied by the desire to see or regain them' or 'a heavy sentiment resulting from the absence of a loved one' (1972, as quoted in Clawson, 2009). Farrell claims that the key features of the term are that: 'saudade is primarily an afflictive feeling (as it involves or resembles sorrow and sadness); it is stimulated by a distant loved one (or thing); it involves wanting this distance to be removed.... it is typically an intense feeling [:] it is a feeling that is thought to occur in the *coração* 'heart'. It can be an edifying feeling' (2006, p.239).

However, if we were to take heed of Stacey's view that children love their parents unconditionally, even in cases in which children are abused by parents, this finding might be considered less significant. But, in the absence of any conclusive view of the matter, we might assume that these were, in fact, positive relationships, the disruption of which was bound to be more meaningful than that of a different kind of relationship.

9.3.3 Prison visits as emotionally challenging

Researchers such as Poehlmann et al. (2010), Fraser (2011) and Cramer, Goff, Peterson and Sandstrom (2017) have previously described researchers' mixed findings and conflicting views relating to prison visits. Indeed, as far back as 1978, in an article entitled 'Should children visit parents in prison?', Sack and Seidler could not give a definitive answer. In this regard, the present research might be considered equally inconclusive, largely due to the fact that the answer depends on the child and circumstances involved. This being said, in the current research there was more than suggestive evidence that the negative repercussions of prison visits generally outweighed the benefits. For example, Mary, who went so far as to discontinue home visits due to the detrimental emotional effect it was having on her daughter, claimed that the girl's daily bouts of crying gradually ceased after this, suggesting that the visits were indeed the cause of her distress. Overall, many more participants' accounts described the negative implications of prison visits (for both children and caregivers) than the positive outcomes.

Aside from the logistical and financial challenges posed by prison visits, visits were seen to affect children's attendance at school. Participants in all cases (ie, mothers, fathers, teachers, other professionals and even children) expressed concerns in relation to the effects visiting prisons might have on children and their development. Consistent with research such as that by Arditti et al. (2005), the emotional effects of visits were to the forefront of these concerns and some were happier for children to stay away from such an 'adult' or 'artificial' environment (Tara; McGrath, 2007, p. 131, respectively). The experience of visiting a prison was described by participants in such a way as to emphasise its cyclical nature; it was frequently considered somewhat similar to being, as the cliché goes, on an emotional rollercoaster.

The cycle of emotions reportedly experienced by children in this study, as well as the perceived reasons for these emotions, is depicted in Figure 5.

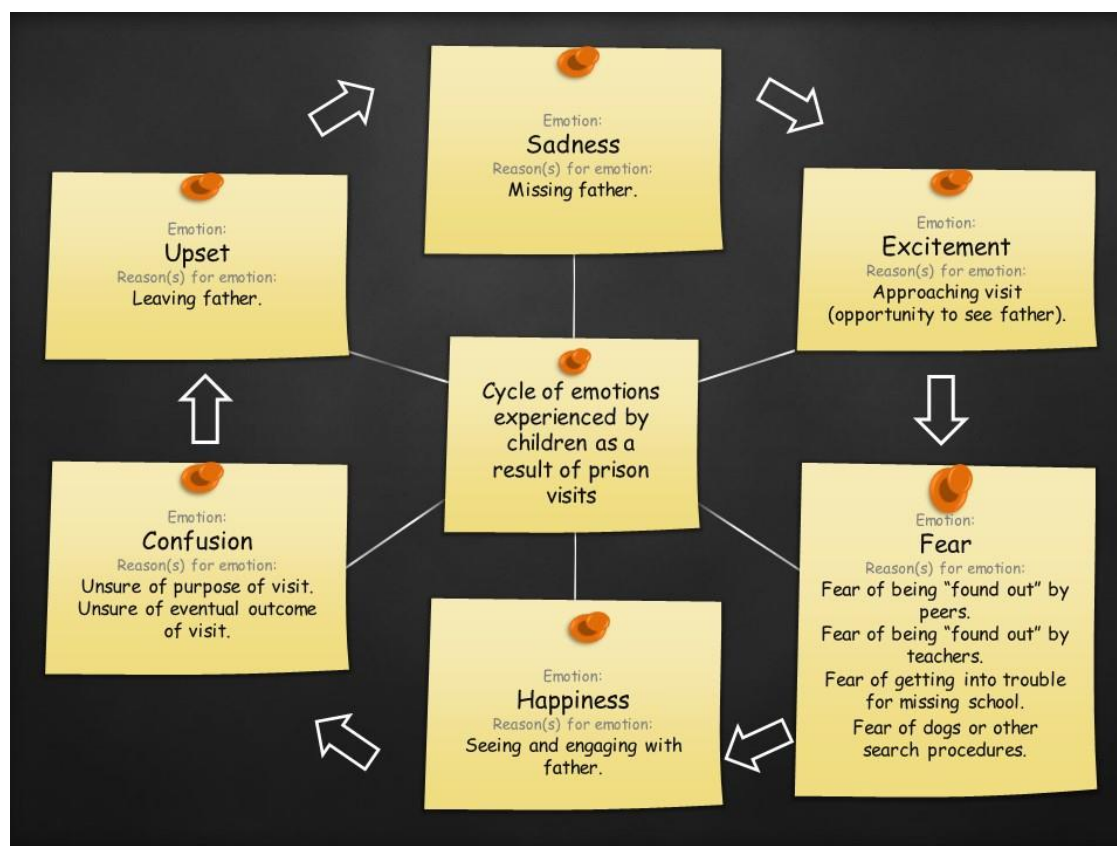


Figure 5 Cycle of emotions experienced by children before, during and after prison visits

It is important to note that children did not always experience these emotions in this particular order. For example, as Mary pointed out, her daughter was often upset before she even met her father, at the thought of being separated from him again after a visit. In addition, not every child experienced all of these emotions. The most commonly reported emotions were sadness, excitement, happiness and upset; fear and confusion were less commonly reported, but still featured. There was suggestive evidence that confusion was more likely to occur in instances involving younger children who were unclear as to the purpose of prison visits. One might, therefore, consider the frequent "acting out" behaviour described by Sarah (who worked in a prison visiting area) to be linked to children's inability to process such a flurry of emotions.

Previous research has reported mixed findings insofar as the outcomes of prison visits (and contact with incarcerated parents more generally) for children are concerned. On the one hand, some researchers such as Trice and Brewster (2004), Shlafer and Poehlmann (2010) and Hedge (2016) have highlighted the benefits of increased contact between children and their incarcerated parents, particularly in relation to maintaining the parent-child bond and easing children's fears concerning fathers' wellbeing. On the other hand, many have outlined the risks of prison visits for children, generally with regard to emotional outcomes and insecure attachment (see, for example, Arditti, 2003; Poehlmann, 2005b; Dallaire et al., 2012). Almost all studies of which I am aware have emphasised the fact that visiting a parent in prison can have potentially positive *and* negative outcomes (see, for example, Boswell & Wedge, 2002). It appears that in certain instances the deleterious emotional effects of prison visits on children can render any benefits null.

As one might expect, a number of mediating factors have been identified over the years. For instance, Sharratt, who reported noticeable differences in children's emotional states while visiting prisons in the UK, Germany, Romania and Sweden, suggested that factors such as the physical prison environment, the level of physical interaction permitted, the provision of child-friendly activities or toys and varying search procedures influenced children's impressions and enjoyment of prison visits (2014). My finding might seem to suggest, above all else, the need for additional supports for children before, during and after prison visits. Indeed, there appears to be a consensus emerging that targeted support for children and caregivers at these times can increase the quality of contact and help to negate any undesirable outcomes of visitation (see, for example, Poehlmann, 2005b; Cramer et al., 2017). In particular, Poehlmann et al. (2010) provide a comprehensive list of recommendations concerning prison visits to be considered at all levels of Bronfenbrenner's EST (see also Light and Campbell, 2006). In line with the findings of this study, this list includes a recommendation that children should be prepared for visits (ie, the procedures to be followed, the emotions to be expected, etc.) in a clear and developmentally-appropriate manner.

This being said, it is important to remember that each child along with his/her circumstances is unique and the balance of potential benefits or negative implications is very much individual to each case. In light of this, the question of visitation (ie, if, how, when or with whom visits should occur) should be broached on an individual basis.

SECTION TWO

9.4 Impact mechanisms

In order to explore and come to an understanding of how (or whether) children's experiences had impacts on their academic lives, two research questions were posed.

- What impacts do these experiences and interpretations have on children's approaches to school work, their attitudes to school and learning and their academic performance?
- What effects do these experiences and interpretations have on interactions relating to children's academic lives?

The resulting data suggest that there are seven primary ways in which paternal incarceration (and the experiences related to it) affect children's academic lives, namely:

- through maternal coping skills and overall parenting skills;
- through children's emotional and behavioural reactions;
- through the roles played by teachers (something likely to be generally influenced by the quality of home-school links);
- through the removal of fathers who conduct school-related tasks;
- through children's social interactions with friends and other peers;
- through school-related attitudes and expectations/ambitions for the future;
- through interactions in more distal environments/at more distal levels of Bronfenbrenner's EST.

9.4.1 Maternal coping skills and overall parenting skills

9.4.1.1 Maternal coping skills

One of the most striking findings to emerge from the data relates to the significant and wide-ranging influence a mother's coping skills can have on children's academic lives. Much research has outlined the difficulties or challenges mothers/carers encounter as a result of paternal incarceration (see, for example, Arditti et al., 2003; Chui, 2010; McEvoy et al., 1999; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2011; Turanovic et al., 2012) and researchers have claimed these pressures can have a detrimental effect on mothers'/carers' emotional and mental health (Morris, 1965; Sack, 1977; Wildeman et al., 2012; Chui, 2016a). Evidence from this study suggests that mothers/carers experience considerable stress following the imprisonment of fathers and that a mother's/carer's ability or inability to cope in such circumstances has implications for a child's academic life. The quality of mothers'/carers' coping skills can influence, for example, children's attendance at school, the level of attention or support children receive at home (including assistance with homework), maternal discipline, children's anxiety levels and the roles children play at home. In line with the latter point, Nesmith and Ruhland, who interviewed 34 children and their caregivers, concluded that the assumption of 'adult-like roles' on the part of children was linked to children's awareness of adult needs (2008, p. 1124).

This finding supports previous assertions that the coping abilities of mothers influence children's adjustment and the quality of their upbringing (Lowenstein, 1986; Hanlon et al., 2005, respectively) and relates somewhat to a number of other studies. For example, Chui's research found that high levels of stress (and depression) among caregivers of children with incarcerated fathers can be associated with the development of anxious and depressive tendencies in children as well as child externalising problems (2016a). Similarly, Mackintosh et al.'s 2006 study regarding relationships between children of incarcerated mothers and their caregivers revealed that such problematic behaviours were reported by children who felt lower levels of warmth and acceptance from caregivers and that these levels were more likely to be low when caregivers experienced high levels of stress and perceived children's behaviour as difficult (suggesting the presence of what is colloquially but vividly and thus usefully referred to as a "vicious circle"). Other

(non-incarceration-related) pieces of literature have suggested that maternal stress and/or depression can have effects on children's self-esteem and overall cognitive and emotional wellbeing and highlighted the role of parenting behaviours and styles in this regard (Kiernan & Huerta, 2008; Ajilchi, Kargar & Ghoreishi, 2013).

Taken together these findings seem to indicate that coping skills of mothers/carers are imperative to effective functioning on the part of a child and the extent of the mother's/carer's coping can have a profound effect on a child's prospects. For example, roughly speaking, when children are not at school, they are not engaging with curricula and when they are fulfilling adult roles at home, they might be neglecting homework or missing out on important social interactions. Similarly, while worrying about the welfare of fathers and mothers/carers - Nesmith and Ruhland posited that children are keenly 'tuned in' to caregivers' emotions (2008, p. 1124; see also Chui, 2010) - concentration skills are likely to be affected. (See section 9.4.2 – *Children's emotional and behavioural reactions* below).

Some studies, including my own work, have revealed mothers/carers who cope better when fathers are in prison. For example, a woman in Chui's research said, 'As he took drugs, I worried about whether he would be caught by somebody. I worried because he didn't bring money home. When he was in prison, I felt very relaxed.' (2010, p. 201; see also Nesmith & Ruhland, 2011). In the current research this finding held true for those instances in which mothers/carers were more adept at coping during father's prison sentences, in that, some teachers noticed marked improvements in, for example, children's attendance when their fathers were in prison. The significance of this finding lies in the fact that it draws our attention to one of the mechanisms by which paternal incarceration significantly affects children's academic lives and might even suggest one of the reasons why, at least for some families, the imprisonment of a father may result in the cycle of disadvantage being repeated from one generation to the next.

9.4.1.2 Overall parenting skills

Often linked to inadequate maternal coping was the issue of poor parenting on the part of mothers/carers and fathers, which served to exacerbate already difficult situations at home as some children became accustomed to getting what they wanted and doing as they pleased. The data identified three ways in which good parenting gave way to bad. The first of these was ineffective or inconsistent discipline. In the case of mothers/carers, such issues were generally attributed to their lacking the metaphorical tools to cope or the energy to discipline their children (see previous section and Kjellstrand & Eddy, 2011b). In 2014 Turney found paternal incarceration to have modest, positive associations with maternal neglect and physically aggressive punishments for children and identified maternal depression as one of the factors relating to such associations (see also Turney, 2011).⁹⁰ Although not entirely comparable, both this and Turney's research agree that the imprisonment of fathers can have deleterious consequences for the types of discipline administered by mothers/carers in their absence.

With regard to fathers, this research found that some fathers were unwilling to chastise or discipline children while serving prison sentences, mainly due to fears of fracturing the father-child bond or feelings of guilt with regard to their absence from the home. The latter was something also identified by King in 2002. As Flynn put it, 'I feel like I can't give out... [I] feel guilty for... missing out'. Several fathers in Arditti et al.'s study attributed their apparent inability to discipline children solely to the limitations imposed by their confinement (2005). By contrast, fathers in my study typically saw their failures to discipline children as being a matter of choice. A possible explanation for this might be incarcerated fathers' varying levels of contact with children in Utah/Oregon and Ireland,⁹¹ which might increase or decrease opportunities to discipline children. Or perhaps Irish fathers' views differed from those of fathers in the US states because the former tended to see themselves as having more control and this might relate to cultural variances insofar as loci of

⁹⁰ Turney's findings concerned parents who had been living together prior to the confinement of fathers (2014).

⁹¹ In comparing Arditti et al.'s (2005) statistics concerning father-child contact to those of Looney (2001), I noted a significantly larger proportion of fathers having reportedly received no visits in the former study: 51% as compared to 32%. Having said this, statistics relating to contact by phone were starkly similar and data regarding frequency of visits were only available in the Irish research.

control are concerned. In 2011 Kjellstrand and Eddy investigated parenting across a comprehensive range of dimensions (ie, monitoring, involvement, quality of the parent/child relationship, praise, inappropriate discipline and inconsistent discipline) and, consistent with the present study, found higher levels of inappropriate and inconsistent discipline among parents of adolescents who had experienced parental incarceration during the first ten years of their lives (2011b; see also Murray & Farrington, 2005; Dannerbeck, 2005). Second, participants described instances in which mothers/carers (as well as members of extended families on occasion) tended to spoil children in an attempt to compensate for the absence of their fathers.

Finally, there was evidence of a lack of solidarity between parents or, as Mary put it, 'one saying one thing and one saying another thing'. This is consistent with research by Turney and Wildeman who, although examining *recent* (as opposed to current) paternal incarceration, found it to be robustly and negatively associated with shared responsibility and cooperation on the part of parents (2013). Aside from potentially having impacts on the wellbeing of imprisoned parents (see Loper, Carlson, Levitt & Scheffel, 2009), it has been claimed that the quality of co-parenting behaviour has implications for children's moods, behaviour and social adjustment (see McHale, Johnson & Sinclair, 1999; Cecil et al., 2008; Baker et al., 2010; McHale & Lindahl, 2011; Loper et al., 2014).⁹² For example, Schoppe, Mangelsdorf and Frosch (2001) found that supportive co-parenting was associated with fewer externalising behaviour problems among children, while undermining forms were associated with more (see also Schoppe-Sullivan, Weldon, Cook, Davis & Buckley, 2009). Furthermore, in 2003 Dopkins Stright and Neitzel spoke directly to this study in concluding that supportive co-parenting was 'an effective predictor of children's attention, passivity/dependence, and grades' (p. 37), increasing the significance of this finding.

⁹² The pieces of research by McHale et al. (1999) and McHale and Lindahl (2011) do not relate specifically to children of incarcerated parents. Those by Cecil et al. (2008) and Baker et al. (2010) are concerned with *maternal* incarceration and that by Loper et al. (2014) with *parental* incarceration. The references in the remainder of this paragraph do not relate specifically to families with incarcerated fathers.

Given that supportive co-parenting is (perhaps obviously) a desirable behaviour, Talbot and McHale's research proves interesting. They found that mothers who were 'highly conscientious, warmly responsive to others, and disciplined in their expression of their feelings' were more likely to enjoy higher levels of harmonious collaboration with their partners in parenting their infants (2004).

Given that a small number of fathers thought it relevant to discuss the roles their own fathers and mothers played during their childhoods, one cannot ignore the idea that parenting behaviours or styles are influenced by one's own childhood experiences of parenting (see Parke, 2002; Hofferth, Pleck & Vesely, 2012). Indeed, Boswell and Wedge (2002), along with Bushfield (2004), noted the influence of inmates' own father role models and, although unrelated to incarceration-related literature, research such as that by Campbell and Gilmore has found evidence of intergenerational continuities for certain types of parenting styles (2007).⁹³ Unfortunately, significant numbers of incarcerated fathers tend to have experienced neglectful or abusive parenting styles in childhood, to have grown up without any father figures or had negative perceptions of parental role models in general (see, for example, Chipman, Olsen, Klein, Hart & Robinson, 2000; Bushfield, 2004; Dennison, Smallbone, Stewart, Freiberg & Teague, 2014), which would have the effect of diminishing opportunities to observe positive parenting behaviours. In McGrath's Irish research prisoners' relationships with their fathers were described as being predominantly negative and 'characterised by the use of violence, harsh physical punishment, poor communication and neglect' (2007). Thus, if parenting behaviours are transmitted from generation to generation in this way, the outcomes are unlikely to be of benefit to children of incarcerated fathers. Having said this, consistent with what Parke refers to as a 'compensatory or reworking hypothesis', an incarcerated man's negative childhood relationship with his own father might encourage him to play a more positive fatherly role when he himself becomes a father (2002, p. 37). Further, from their review of the literature, Serbin and Karp claim that educational achievement can act as a buffer to negative parenting behaviours, increasing the significance of children's academic lives (2003).

⁹³ Campbell and Gilmore found evidence of intergenerational continuities for authoritarian and permissive parenting styles, particularly from fathers to sons (2007).

Whether caused by paternal guilt, maternal strain or a lack of positive parental role models, ineffective parenting practices, as described above, were significantly linked to problematic behaviour on the part of children, perhaps understandably so. For example, one cannot deny that Fergal's reaction 'just [to] laugh' upon hearing his son had flooded a toilet at school could be seen as a form of encouragement by his son as well as his partner (who reportedly told him as much). In 2007 Kinner et al. found maternal parenting styles to mediate the effects of paternal incarceration on behavioural outcomes of adolescents. However, their measures of parenting styles were limited to four questions relating to the amount of freedom afforded to children. Thus, Kjellstrand and Eddy's more comprehensive examination might provide a more appropriate point of reference; their analysis concluded that the effects of parental incarceration on youth antisocial behaviour were fully mediated by effective parenting (as well as social advantage and parental health) at fifth grade level (2011a),⁹⁴ a finding that sits well with the current study.

Aside from behavioural outcomes, parenting behaviours and styles might also affect children's academic performance. For example, according to the broader literature on parenting, some researchers have found authoritative and democratic parenting styles to be associated with higher grades or levels of academic achievement, as compared to other parenting styles (see, for example, Murray, 2012; Dopkins Stright & Yeo, 2014; Jabaghourian, Sorkhabi, Quach & Strage, 2014; Wang, 2014, but also Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013), although such associations might be mediated by other factors (see Masud, Ahmad, Jan & Jamil, 2016; Murray, 2012).

Finally, parenting behaviours and parenting styles have been linked to the calibre of children's emotion regulation skills (see Calkins, Smith, Gill & Johnson, 1998; Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers & Robinson, 2007). According to Cecil et al., the positive effects of co-parental (and co-caregiver) solidarity on a child's attachment and emotional security can serve to enhance emotion regulation skills (2008). Taken as

⁹⁴ Kjellstrand and Eddy's study found youth externalising behaviour to be fully mediated by effective parenting, social advantage and parental health at fifth and eighth grade levels and partially mediated by these domains at tenth grade level, with parental incarceration being directly related to antisocial behaviour at this point (2011a). Given the age range of children discussed in this study, just findings in relation to fifth grade are of relevance here.

a whole, negative parenting behaviours (particularly as they relate to discipline and co-parenting) appear to be more prevalent among this particular group and can have a number of detrimental consequences - behaviourally, emotionally and academically - for the children concerned.

9.4.2 Children's emotional and behavioural reactions

A considerable number of children discussed in the present research were said to have displayed distinct emotional and behavioural reactions, most (if not all) of which were considered to have been related to fathers' imprisonment. Where suggesting the prevalence of deteriorations in children's behaviour following the incarceration of fathers is concerned, the current study sits somewhere in the middle between Boswell and Wedge's 22% and Noble's 80% and corresponds somewhat with Tudball's 62% (2002, 1995, as cited in Boswell & Wedge, 2002; 2000, respectively), with over half of participants stating that children's behaviour had changed following fathers' incarceration. Consistent with findings by Dallaire et al. in 2010, these changes included symptoms of emotional turmoil, as well as forms of internalising and externalising behaviour. Before I proceed to discuss these reactions, it is important to note that some children did not display obvious signs of emotional disturbance or problematic behaviour and/or appeared to be able to deal with their emotions in other ways. For instance, similar to children in Nesmith and Ruhland's study (2008), Carol's grandson found a more positive outlet for his anger and frustration; retreating to the garden, he would kick a ball against a wall for up to two hours when he felt it necessary to release these emotions. However, for the majority of children, emotional and/or behavioural reactions took more worrying forms.

For example, some children were said to have been noticeably anxious. While a certain portion of these children (ie, those who had been deceived) were concerned about their fathers' whereabouts, others worried about their mothers, about their circumstances becoming known or about getting into trouble at school and being sent to jail, etc. Some of these reasons for worrying have been identified previously by King (2002), Chui (2010) and Nesmith & Ruhland (2008).

From an educational standpoint, it might be reasonable to conclude that children's concentration can be negatively affected by anxiety or that paternal incarceration can be a distraction, in a similar way to that described by Barry – 'sometimes, when the teacher's talking, my mind just drifts away... I think about in prison' (see also Kampfner, 1995; McCrickard & Flynn, 2015). Indeed, Geller et al. found children with incarcerated fathers to have more attention problems than their peers (2012) and, according to Eysenck, Derakshan, Santos and Calvo's Attentional Control Theory, anxiety has a distinct effect on concentration- and performance-related issues, producing an 'increased susceptibility to distraction,... impaired performance on secondary tasks in dual-task situations, and... impaired task-switching performance' (2007, p.348). This being said, a later study by Derakshan, Ansari, Hansard, Shoker and Eysenck found that anxiety had implications for performance *efficiency*, but not necessarily performance *effectiveness*, suggesting that anxious people and non-anxious people might perform similarly, but the performance would take greater effort on the part of the anxious people (2009). This resounds with Tara's opinion that, in order for these children to achieve similar results to their peers, they require higher levels of support.

A number of children were described as having become guarded or withdrawn and such reactions were generally seen to be related to children's fears of being "found out", of rejection or of being taken into state care. Regardless of the reason, such withdrawal was often considered to have had impacts on their levels of engagement, not just with their friends and other peers, but also with school curricula. For example, Tara claimed that children sometimes drew away from friendships after fathers had been sent to prison, a point discussed previously by Breen (1995) and Miller (2006). Teresa noticed that, after their father's imprisonment, the children in her school were hesitant to take part in lessons that required them to discuss themselves or their feelings.

A significant proportion of children reportedly displayed aggressive or challenging behaviour. This finding is in line with prior research by Geller et al. (2012), who found that paternal incarceration had a 'robust effect' on aggression in children, as well as that by Murray and Farrington (2005), Wilbur et al. (2007), Hampton (2009) and Wildeman (2010). While often considered to be linked to ineffective parenting skills, there might be some alternative explanations. Firstly, similar to the findings of Schultz, Izard and Bear (2004), who found that deficits in emotion processing were associated with elevated levels of (teacher-reported) aggression, participants such as Thelma and Stacey suggested that children's behavioural responses to paternal incarceration may have been caused by their inability to process or regulate the complex set of emotions with which they were trying to contend. This reminds us (and might re-emphasise the importance) of the influence parenting behaviours and styles can have on children's emotion regulation (see Morris et al., 2007; Cecil et al., 2008). An alternative explanation is provided by Chui (2016a): in his analysis of the association between caregiver stress and behavioural problems among children of incarcerated fathers in Hong Kong, he found that caregivers' perceived stress corresponded to the severity of children's internalising and externalising problems, again drawing us back to the significance of mothers' and carers' coping skills. The fact that four of the six teachers in this study reported some children's behavioural problems to have been confined to home and not at all evident in school might support Chui's theory. Consistent with King's previous research in the Irish context (2002), participants also described some instances in which children's challenging behaviour was quite obviously linked to their desires to be imprisoned alongside their fathers.

In any case, as previously discussed in Chapter Five, aggressive and otherwise challenging behaviour can have short- and long-term implications for children's academic lives, not only in relation to discipline and academic performance (see, for example, Johnston, 1995b), but also for peer relationships. Indeed, in comparison to their peers, Hampton found that children of incarcerated parents exhibited higher levels of aggressive behaviour in social settings with other children (2009), which can have negative repercussions for overall relationships and future interactions (see Murray & Farrington, 2005).

9.4.3 Roles played by teachers

9.4.3.1 A multiplicity of roles

To my mind, an intriguing aspect of the research was the role(s) teachers (and principals) played. Aside from that of educator, it was clear that the imprisonment of a father often resulted in teachers fulfilling new roles and acquiring additional responsibilities. One such role was that of counsellor – one teacher even went so far as to say psychologist – for both children and mothers. For example, teachers reported offering considerable emotional (and, for children, behavioural) support - calming angry children and distraught mothers/carers, attempting to ease their anxieties and teaching children ways in which to deal with or process complex emotions. Associated with this was the role of confidante, which was assumed by some, although admittedly not a large proportion of, teachers (as some children appeared to be afraid to speak to teachers or suspicious of their involvement).

It was clear from the data that many teachers assumed protective, almost parent-like, roles and made considerable attempts to “look out for” these particular children. For instance, the way in which Teresa provided children with school uniforms to prevent them from being noticeably different to their peers demonstrated her genuine concern and attentiveness to their needs. Teachers’ attempts to source additional supports, whether financial, emotional or otherwise, for children and families was another way in which they went above and beyond the “call of duty”. Another role that principals and teachers tended to play was that of campaigner for fathers’ early/temporary release; this usually involved writing letters of recommendation or character references and ensuring that they reached the relevant authorities.⁹⁵ Finally, teachers were often asked by mothers/carers for assistance in disciplining children and in keeping fathers’ whereabouts concealed.

⁹⁵ Of course, this could seem controversial with people who had been the victims of crime, or those who had to live with its implications (eg, increasingly more intrusive CCTV in public places), wary of the possibility that teachers and principals acting in such capacities were the dupes of the prisoners’ families. In the end, regardless of the extent of the sympathy we might offer to the children of prisoners, one view could be that (barring clear miscarriages of justice) some of these men needed to be where they were. Thus, a prisoner’s early release, although it may be beneficial for children, could mean that the value of the sentence (whether conceived of as deterrent, retribution or for rehabilitation) is lost or diminished.

Essentially, teachers, by virtue of their positions and their having almost daily contact with children and families, were easily accessible sources of support. In the absence of school nurses or counsellors (from whose services children in other countries might benefit [Jones et al., 2013]), teachers in Irish primary and pre-schools were, for many mothers, carers and children who required assistance, the only people to whom they could think to turn.

There have been indications in existing research that teachers are generally quite supportive when they are informed of a father's whereabouts (see Jones et al., 2013, Roberts & Loucks, 2015; Morgan et al., 2013). For example, in 1988 Moore, while claiming that teachers were typically unaware of children's father's prison sentences, found evidence of at least one teacher acting as a confidante for a child whom he interviewed and in 2009 Cho suggested that children's reduced likelihood of being retained in a particular class level following maternal imprisonment might be attributable to sympathetic teachers who promoted children of incarcerated mothers (2009b). However, few (if any) have revealed the multifaceted nature of the roles such teachers play. Of course the Irish context may be of significance here. Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko and Fernandez believe that teachers' willingness to assume such extended roles in children's lives is, at least to some degree, related to Catholic school culture, in which teachers are often officially expected to be concerned not only with children's academic achievement, but also with 'the character and moral integrity of each student' (1989, p. 45). Given the historically religious (and primarily Catholic) context of the Irish education system, it might not be implausible to suspect that Catholic school culture could have played at least some part in the prevalence of extended teacher roles reported by participants.

The broader literature has indicated the vital role teacher-child relationships can play insofar as academic and behavioural outcomes are concerned (see, for example, Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004; O'Connor, Dearing & Collins, 2011) and Wehlage et al. have highlighted the importance of extended teacher roles (such as those described here) in the lives of at-risk students and, in particular, in assisting students to 'overcome impediments to membership and engagement' (1989, p. 194). While at least one of the roles identified in the current research might be

equally likely to be assumed by teachers teaching in disadvantaged areas who are *not* dealing with children of incarcerated parents, it would appear that paternal incarceration can further extend such roles, thus increasing the significance of teachers in these children's lives.

9.4.3.2 Home-school links

Consistent with Bronfenbrenner's EST as well as research such as that by McCrickard and Flynn (2015) and Jones et al. (2013), this research found that interactions between school and home (at the level of the mesosystem) tended significantly to influence children's relationships and interactions with teachers (at the level of the microsystem). This would seem to have been so primarily as a result of the level of honesty and openness with which the child's circumstances were discussed with teachers.

A number of research studies have previously referred to children and parents being unwilling or hesitant to inform teachers when fathers, or indeed other family members, were incarcerated (see, for example, Sack, 1977; King, 2002; Meek, 2008; Jones et al., 2013). In contrast to Moore's finding that 90% of children in his sample who had incarcerated parents were not known to be so by their teachers (1988), a substantial number of teachers discussed (by participants other than teachers) in this research – at least 61% - were aware or had been informed of a father's imprisonment.⁹⁶

However, my results must be interpreted with some caution, as it might be reasonable to assume that parents who agreed to be interviewed for the purposes of this research were likely to have been more open and honest about their situations in general. Alternatively, the apparent inconsistency might be due to the lapse of almost 30 years between the two studies and variations with regard to public attitudes to imprisonment over that period. Indeed, fears in relation to how children (or entire families) might be perceived and subsequently treated were the primary cause of concern among those parents (and children) who decided to

⁹⁶ Having said this, many teachers were not kept abreast of further developments or informed of the extent of children's knowledge on the topic.

refrain from speaking to teachers about fathers' imprisonment. In this regard, there are similarities between the present study and that of King (2002). Parental perceptions of teachers and the presence (or absence) of HSCL teachers in schools also appeared to influence the likelihood that parents would be open with schools, an observation that warrants further investigation in future research.

However, perceived stigma did not appear to correspond to the actual outcomes of parents having been honest and open with teachers, for those who chose to be so. As previously stated, not one parent interviewed reported any negative outcomes (in relation to stigma or otherwise) of schools having been informed of the situation. In fact, for many, it had quite the opposite effect, in that, schools responded sensitively in providing considerable support (see Boswell & Wedge, 2002; Roberts & Loucks, 2015). And, although Stacey and Tara reported isolated instances of teachers apparently having negative perceptions of children of incarcerated fathers or indifferent reactions to the imprisonment of fathers (respectively),⁹⁷ this finding is significant, in that, it suggests that parental fears with regard to stigma are generally unfounded. In fact, similar to Chris's account in Dennison and Smallbone's research (2015), the most commonly reported advantage of (as well as the main reason parents gave for) being honest with schools was that teachers could then support the families concerned. Thus, communication and overall relations between home and school were seen to play an integral role in determining the level of support received by children, as well as by mothers/carers.

To this end, two particular pieces of research may prove interesting. First, Nichols et al. have identified school connectedness (as defined in footnote number 41) as a potential compensatory factor for adolescent children insofar as academic achievement and truancy are concerned (2016). And second, Hollins' research findings indicate that children of incarcerated parents themselves - in particular their invitations to/demands of parents - are most influential in encouraging

⁹⁷ Morgan et al. (2013) and Roberts and Loucks (2015) each identified one case in which teachers either were insensitive or appeared to have negative perceptions of a child that were related to a father's incarceration/criminality (respectively).

parental involvement in the family-school partnership (2016).⁹⁸ Put simply, home-school links are especially important for this group of children and the children themselves play a vital role in promoting parental engagement and, thereby, creating or strengthening such connections.

9.4.4 Removal of fathers who conduct school-related tasks

In many cases, the repercussions of paternal imprisonment served to create new or exacerbate existing school-related problems, such as poor attendance or failure to complete homework (at all or to a satisfactory standard). These problems were generally considered to have an effect on children's academic performance. While maternal coping skills were reported to be a major influencing factor in this regard, the removal of a father who fulfilled a number of school-related roles or performed a range of school-related functions was also considered to have a direct impact on such issues. Similar to the accounts of participants in studies such as those by Chui (2010), Boswell and Wedge (2002) and the Ormiston Children and Families Trust (2007), some participants in this study noted that fathers were, as a result of their confinement, unable to continue to bring children to and from school, help in some way with homework (even if this was simply to provide incentives to do homework) or take part in education-related activities such as reading to/with children. In the current study participants believed this had had direct repercussions for children in an academic sense.

Consistent with the idea that such paternal (and maternal) involvement can have implications for children's educational attainment (see, for example, Flouri & Buchanan, 2004; Singh, Mbokodi & Msila, 2004), in outlining a very practical way in which paternal incarceration can have impacts on children's academic lives, this finding may explain at least one reason why some research has shown children of imprisoned parents to be more likely to experience lower levels of academic success or attainment than their peers (see, for example, Trice & Brewster, 2004; Habecker, 2013). The significance of this loss of support might be seen to increase when one

⁹⁸ Hollins identified other influencing factors such as caregivers' beliefs regarding their roles in family-school partnerships, school/teacher invitations, caregivers' abilities to support their children academically and the amount of time they could dedicate to doing so.

considers the increased demands on a mothers' time and coping skills after a father is imprisoned and, as a result, the decreased likelihood that she would be able fully to take on the role of an absent father.

On a more heartening note, it was not considered impossible for fathers serving prison sentences to exert some sort of influence on children's academic lives. Similar to participants in Hairston's study, some fathers claimed to have continued to provide 'educational encouragement' from inside prison walls (2002, p.119; see also Dennison & Smallbone, 2015). For example, Frank spoke about offering school-related advice to his son and Fred had school reports sent to the prison in which he was confined so that he could discuss his children's progress with them in light of the reports' contents. As a whole, given that the Irish Constitution recognises the family to be 'the primary and natural educator of the child' (Article 42.1), it follows that the removal of a father from a family is, essentially, the removal of a crucial source of educational support for his child(ren). However, it is clear that, if they do not allow confinement to dampen their dedication to assisting their children in their academic endeavours, fathers have a considerable amount to offer their offspring in the form of encouragement and advice.

9.4.5 Children's social interactions

Contrary to Bocknek et al.'s findings (2009), friendships made by most of the children discussed in this study were reported to have been unaffected by paternal imprisonment, in that, friendships remained intact and appeared to function as before the imprisonment of fathers. The exceptions to this trend had one of two things in common. Firstly (and more frequently), the children whose friendships were affected had themselves displayed noticeable behavioural reactions to their fathers' incarceration such as withdrawal from friendships or aggression. Such reactions were also noted by Breen and teachers in Dallaire et al.'s research (1995 and 2010, respectively) and supports previous findings linking aggressive behaviour or withdrawal to problematic peer relations in the general child population (see, for example, Newcomb, Bukowski & Pattee, 1993).

Second, the remaining children whose relationships with friends were interrupted were either young or their friendships were in their infancy. This might be indicative of relationships (between children of imprisoned fathers and either their friends or friends' parents) that are not firmly established being more easily affected by stigma. Consistent with contact theory (Allport, 1954), similar findings have been noted in relation to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual [LGBT] community/ies. For example, Herek and Capitanio found that heterosexuals who reported interpersonal contact with gay men had more positive attitudes to this particular population than those without such contact (1996). The same might be true of friends (or parents of friends) when they have developed a close relationship with a child whose father is subsequently imprisoned. Their intimacy could serve to protect friendships from the negative effects of stigmatisation. Further research (perhaps involving the observation of children's structured and unstructured interactions with peers or interviews with peers and parents of peers) would be of benefit in attempting to understand the mechanisms at play in this regard.

To return to the initial point raised in this section, it is possible that the variance between the current study and that of Bocknek et al. in 2009 can be explained by the fact that Bocknek et al.'s research was based solely on interviews with children from first to tenth grade level and that children were the least represented group (and the only group not actually interviewed) in the present sample. This might raise questions as to the reliability of child participants in research or the usefulness of speaking to parents and teachers about *children's* friendships, with consultations with each group having distinct advantages and disadvantages. Alternatively, it may be due to cultural differences; Bocknek et al.'s sample comprised mainly of children from minority groups (ie, African-American or Hispanic) living in the USA (2009), while the current sample were adults of ethnic Irish descent, living in the Republic of Ireland.

Similar to Martyn's Irish research, there was evidence of some children finding friendships with other children whose fathers were in prison easier (2012; see also Miller, 2006). A shared experience of parental incarceration was also encountered by Nesmith and Ruhland and, while most of these children were immediately at ease

with such “comrades”, they could easily have been speaking of Monica’s daughter when they described two children who ‘did not get to know each other after... [accidentally learning of their common circumstances], or talk more of it, but rather seemed uncomfortable with that knowledge’ (2008, p. 1123). However, after a number of years, the girls discussed in this study drew closer and were ‘best friends’ by the time they left secondary school. Given that such friendships offer a certain sense of belonging and automatic acceptance, it may not be unreasonable to assume that the ease with which such links are forged is associated with children’s desires to fit in and not to be seen as different (also a noteworthy theme in the research).

Similar to findings by, for example, Boswell and Wedge (2002) and Martyn (2012), some children in this study had been bullied or teased about their fathers’ incarceration by peers and some were even physically attacked. Many children whose peers were unaware of fathers’ whereabouts were afraid of such outcomes and, in accordance with previous research by Tudball (2000) and Meek (2008),⁹⁹ some were reluctant to disclose the truth. Having a father or mother in prison *could* result in maltreatment by peers (Martyn, 2012). However, contrary to what some children in my research apparently feared might be the case, there was evidence that paternal incarceration was not always the cause of maltreatment by peers in itself but rather was, as Tom put it, a stick with which to beat children when they had disagreements with peers about other things. This is consistent with Thelma’s view that children in general do not have stigmas and that any perceived stigmas are actually those transmitted from parents to their offspring (see also section 9.4.7).

In any case, many children were neither teased, bullied nor attacked. In fact, there was notable evidence of kindness in some peer relationships. For example, some participants considered children of incarcerated fathers to have been especially helpful to others (consistent with previous findings by Hampton, 2009) and, similarly, peers were sometimes very thoughtful in their dealings with these children.

⁹⁹ Meek’s research relates to children whose siblings, as opposed to parents, were imprisoned (2008).

Overall, findings in relation to children's social interactions significantly highlight the importance of children's behavioural reactions to paternal incarceration, the attitudes and actions of peers' parents and children's desires for acceptance insofar as their friendships and relationships with other peers are concerned.

9.4.6 Attitudes, aspirations and expectations

Unfortunately, most participants in this research were not in a position to provide sufficient performance-related information that was specific (and accurate) enough to allow definitive conclusions to be drawn about children's academic performance (and, therefore, the impact paternal incarceration may have had on performance). Despite the fact that the available results indicated slight deteriorations in academic achievement following the imprisonment of fathers, the number available was far too small to make any generalisations in this particular sample. Nonetheless, there was considerable evidence to suggest that children's *approaches* to schoolwork were influenced not only by their attitudes to school and learning¹⁰⁰ (as one might expect), but also by their ambitions for the future and these, in turn, were often influenced by paternal incarceration. For example, for some children, the imprisonment of a father was an event which motivated them to break the cycle¹⁰¹ – as Ben put it, 'I hope my future is not like my dad's. I hope I become successful in the future' – and succeeding in an academic sense was seen as a way in which to accomplish this goal. For others, significant future experiences of the justice system were considered almost inevitable and something over which they had no control. As a result of this perceived 'inescapable "fate" ' (Amira, 1992, p. 87; see also Reckdahl, 2015), these children viewed school as an irrelevance and, accordingly, displayed indifferent approaches to schoolwork, characterised by a distinct absence of ambition.

¹⁰⁰ Admittedly, there were some exceptions to this observation, as previously mentioned in Chapter Seven.

¹⁰¹ This has been referred to as 'Batman syndrome' (see Reckdahl, 2015, p. 17) - after the well-known superhero who turns to crime-fighting after the murder of his parents - and is considered the opposite of allowing (self-) fulfilling prophecies to manifest themselves.

Khattab found students with either high aspirations or high expectations with regard to their futures to have higher school achievement than those with both low aspirations and low expectations (2015). Patently, not all who try achieve and not all who achieve have always tried. But those in the latter category (the children of the fabulously wealthy and the like) are rare and there is an obvious relationship between effort and success. Effort is not always and everywhere crowned with success but success typically requires effort and effort comes more easily when there is at least a *belief* in oneself and one's ability to influence one's own life course. Attribution styles (Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1967) and perceptions regarding internal/external loci of control (Rotter, 1966) among these children could well be issues deserving of further scholarly attention.

In addition, parents' and teachers' expectations insofar as children's futures were concerned appeared to be linked to children's approaches to schoolwork, with all references to high expectations mentioned alongside children's purposeful approaches and any references to lowered expectations for the future discussed in conjunction with apathetic approaches. In a study that examined socio-economic status as it pertained to children's abilities in Mathematics and reading at kindergarten level, Larson, Russ, Nelson, Olson and Halfon found that parents' expectations or aspirations for their children's futures predicted children's levels of academic success, with 96% of children who had the highest scores on early reading and Mathematics assessments expected to attend college, compared to 57% of those with the lowest test scores (2015; see also Ma, 2001; Singh, Bickley, Trivette, Keith, Keith & Anderson, 1995). Halfon maintained that 'parents who saw college in their child's future seemed to manage their child toward that goal irrespective of their income and other assets' (Nauert, 2015). But even if this is so, socio-economic status may still be relevant, at least in Ireland, as Larson et al. discovered that, overall, parents' expectations tended to be higher among those in higher socio-economic classes (2015).¹⁰²

¹⁰² Larson et al. claimed that almost all parents in higher socio-economic classes expected their children to earn a college degree, compared to approximately half those in the lowest socio-economic quintile (2015).

Regarding teachers' expectations, Wildeman et al. uncovered evidence to suggest that teachers tended to have lower expectations with regard to students' behavioural competencies when their fathers were imprisoned (2017; see also Dallaire et al.'s 2010 study concerning teachers' expectations of students abilities when *mothers* were imprisoned). This was not always the case in the current sample and, if the variation in results cannot be attributed solely to cultural factors, then perhaps it can be explained by contact theory (Allport, 1954), as both Wildeman et al.'s and Dallaire et al.'s findings emerged from studies that used hypothetical scenarios to explore teachers' expectations. Thus, even though teachers were reflecting on their professional experience, their responses were not based on observations of students with whom they had had contact or a relationship.

In any case, the current research highlights the possibility of interpersonal expectancy effects occurring among this population, at least insofar as children's *approaches* to schoolwork are concerned. And although Jussim and Harber found the extent of such effects on children's actual outcomes to be generally modest, they suggested the possibility of effects being greater for students from stigmatised backgrounds (2005).¹⁰³ An alternative explanation as to why teachers' expectations were so closely linked to children's approaches to schoolwork may be that students' approaches mediated their levels of achievement and, as Williams has suggested could be the case, teachers' expectations might be based primarily on students' achievement (1976; see also Turney & Haskins, 2014). In other words, teachers' expectations could simply be accurate measures of children's abilities (Jussim, Eccles & Madon, 1996). To this end, further research with regard to levels of academic achievement among children of incarcerated parents in Ireland is required.

Of course, one cannot eliminate the possibility that *parental* attitudes to school or education might permeate or influence children's attitudes to school and, consequently, their approaches to schoolwork. Given that all of the inmate

¹⁰³ Jussim and Harber's study (2005) was not concerned with students of incarcerated parents, but rather students more generally. The same is true of Jussim et al.'s research (1996), mentioned later in the paragraph.

participants in Carrigan and Maunsell's study and many fathers in this one described negative experiences of compulsory education as children (and, by implication, had negative attitudes to formal education), this possibility does not bode well for children of offenders (2014). In 2016 Irish research found that children whose mothers had a high level of education (ie, a degree or higher qualification) had more positive attitudes to school than those whose mothers had a lower level of education (Smyth). If we take mothers' levels of education as being indicative of their attitudes to education, we might conclude that attitudes to school and learning can be in some way transmitted from one generation to the next. While the evidence generated in this research was not sufficient to suggest this to be the case, there were instances in which it seemed likely. For example, it transpired that Fintan, who described his son's troubled interactions at school, had himself, at the age of only 12, burned down the school he was attending after a disagreement with a teacher. The idea that his attitude to school could have had at least some effect on that of his son could hardly be seen as implausible. In consequence, building on previous work by Dallaire et al. (2010) and Wildeman et al. (2017), this finding brings to light another possible mechanism by which paternal incarceration might have impacts on children's academic lives and, ultimately, futures.

9.4.7 Interactions in more distal environments

Interactions at the levels of the exosystem and macrosystem can have implications for children's academic lives. For example, at the level of the exosystem, aside from the obvious effects the justice system had on children in the current research, media reporting of fathers' crimes/imprisonment resulted in some teachers and peers finding out about these events through channels other than direct communication with the child or family. This had the effect of encouraging some mothers/carers to inform teachers of such events before it became "common knowledge", but discouraged others who assumed, once it had been reported, that everyone knew. In the cases of the latter, this often meant that teachers who knew felt unable to broach the subject with parents who had not volunteered the information or, alternatively, that teachers did not find out at all.

At the level of the macrosystem, there was evidence to suggest that community attitudes to (crime and) imprisonment (usually resulting from high or low prevalence rates) might have had implications for how some children interpreted paternal incarceration and/or how they perceived their futures. For example, in some cases, high rates of imprisonment served to reinforce the idea that a child was on an 'inevitable path' (Thelma). The stigmatisation to which children and families of incarcerated parents can be subjected has been well-documented (see, for example, Boswell & Wedge, 2002; Phillips & Gates, 2011). Consistent with Murray et al.'s speculation that more accepting public opinions of crime and imprisonment could reduce the impact of parental incarceration on children (2007), this research found stigma and its effects to be more commonly (but not always only) reported when families lived in middle-class areas where imprisonment rates were lower. Further, its effects were more apparent at the levels of the exosystem and macrosystem, as evidenced by, for instance, the letter written by a parent of a child in Melissa's son's school demanding his immediate removal from the school, as well as the increased likelihood of parents informing schools of fathers' imprisonment in areas in which it was deemed more acceptable or 'basic'ly the norm' (Flynn). Overall, the present research demonstrates the influence those outside of children's immediate social settings can exert on their academic lives and, in so doing, corresponds somewhat with the work of Patacchini and Zenou, who claimed that the educational achievement of children from families with lower levels of education were influenced more by community effects than those whose families had higher levels of education (for whom family effects played a more important role; 2011).

9.4.8 The interconnected nature of these mechanisms

Even though these mechanisms have been discussed separately they should not be viewed as independent of one another, as it is clear from the data that they are often inextricably interlinked. For example, mothers or carers who were described as being unable to cope were those most likely to approach teachers for assistance, which had effects on the roles these teachers played in children's lives. And children's emotional and behavioural reactions to the imprisonment of their fathers often had repercussions for their relationships with friends and other peers.

Thus, if one can visualise these interconnected metaphorical pathways to success or maladaptation as physical pathways, along which both paternal incarceration (ie, the obstacle) *and* children can travel, it might be easier to understand why paternal incarceration does not *always* succeed in diverting children towards maladaptation.

SECTION 3

9.5 Moderating factors

In terms of factors that might have a moderating effect on children's experiences or outcomes, age or developmental stage of the child was the only significant one. There was compelling evidence that the age of a child was a factor in determining the level of honesty with which parents explained a father's absence. This is consistent with Chui and Yeung's research in 2016, in that, older children were more likely to be told the truth and younger children more likely to be told a distorted/untrue version of events. The outcomes or repercussions of such deception have been discussed previously.

Some existing research has posited that children's age or developmental stage might be important insofar as children's reactions or adjustment are concerned (see, for example, Miller, 2006; Myers et al., 1999). In this study, on the one hand, some participants were of the opinion that a child's age at the time of the imprisonment of a father was an important element in his/her adjustment. Contrary to teachers' views in Dallaire et al.'s study (2010), most of these participants felt that older children were more affected. However, comparing the age ranges of the studies in question, this apparent contradiction may not be so. Dallaire et al. interviewed teachers in elementary, middle and high schools and so 'younger' in their study might be seen to equate with 'older' in the current research, implying that children in primary (and, perhaps, in particular the upper half of primary) school might be most at risk and/or less adept at coping. This contradicts findings by Poehlmann (2005b) who found that, in children between the ages of 2.5 to 7.5 years, older children exhibited signs of more secure attachment, suggesting that younger children were most affected. However, Poehlmann's study provides an explanation

for this inconsistency that resounds well with the current research; she found that children who were told about the incarceration in ‘an open, honest, and developmentally appropriate manner... were slightly more likely to have secure-positive representations of caregivers’ (2005b, p. 690).

On the other hand, other participants felt that it was not children’s ages but rather *personalities* (eg, as Carol said, being a ‘softie’) that influenced how they perceived and came to terms with their fathers’ incarceration. Thus, outside of the impact that can be accounted for by differential explanations for a father’s absence, there was no conclusive evidence of age playing a determining role in how a child might react or be affected by a father’s imprisonment and it could well be that age has no significant impact at all (see Murray et al., 2007; Murray et al., 2012).

9.6 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to draw together the findings of this study and much existing research in order to paint a comprehensive picture of the experiences of children with imprisoned fathers and examine how paternal incarceration influences children’s academic lives. In 2013 Poehlmann and Eddy cautioned against allowing ‘the emphasis on disrupted family relationships and multiple risks in children with incarcerated parents [to]... overshadow our examination of possible resilience processes in these children’ (p. 2). In line with this warning, the current study has identified six pathways to resilience. Admittedly, these pathways can simultaneously lead to maladjustment if one travels in the opposite (or wrong) direction. Nevertheless, the identification of these seven mechanisms provides us with tentative ideas as to how one might clear the paths to resilience and minimise risks to children’s academic experiences and overall prospects. Chapter Ten outlines the specific strengths and limitations of the present research and discusses implications for policy and practice.

Chapter Ten

Strengths, limitations and implications of the research

10.1 Chapter overview

In this, the final, chapter, after considering the strengths and limitations of the current research, I conclude with a discussion of the implications of its findings, which is both as general and as concrete as possible.

10.2 Strengths and limitations

A major strength of this research was related to its use of a multiple case study approach. Findings emerged from converging evidence from parent/carer, child, teacher and professional accounts, thereby allowing the potential biases of each group to be minimised and increasing the overall level of trustworthiness of the study. Being one of just a small number of studies to have interviewed teachers of children with incarcerated parents, this study provides valuable insights into the lives of these children outside of the home environment.

On the other hand, however, the research has a number of limitations or caveats. First and foremost, children's accounts were limited to just two short written pieces, which was regrettable but necessary due to ethical considerations. Interviews with children would have added considerable richness to the data, especially had children been aware of their fathers' incarceration and familiar/comfortable enough with the researcher to be entirely open and honest.

Second, the majority of mothers/carers were recruited through a support group for families of prisoners. As a result (and as previously noted), one might suspect that these participants were likely to have been more open about their circumstances in general. In particular, this may have had impacts on the reported prevalence rates insofar as informing schools and accessing support services were concerned. To this end, it was useful to hear mothers/carers talking about others they knew in similar situations and, where relevant, I noted these references.

The final caveat concerns representativeness of the sample. In the absence of official records or information regarding children of incarcerated parents and their circumstances, it is difficult to ascertain if the fathers, mothers and teachers who were interviewed in this research are representative of all fathers, mothers and teachers of pre- and primary school children who have experienced paternal incarceration in the Republic of Ireland. The same might be said of the children and professionals involved in the research. For example, I can note that a very large proportion (between 50% and 83%) of teacher participants worked in schools with DEIS status, but we lack the information that might enable us to state with any certainty whether or not this is representative of the status of schools in which teachers of children with incarcerated fathers are employed. It can be pointed out, however, that participants *volunteered* to participate in the study. Cohen, Manion and Morrison point out that participants 'may have a range of different motives for volunteering' and that, even when their intentions are good, volunteers cannot be assumed to be representative of the population being studied (2011, p. 160). Thus, I refrain from making any claims insofar as representativeness of the sample is concerned.

10.3 Implications for policy and practice

10.3.1 Implications for political decision-making

It is clear from the findings of this research that steps need to be taken to address the inattention to the needs of children with fathers (and, by implication, mothers) in prison in the Republic of Ireland. The first of these might be the recognition of these children as a vulnerable group in government policy documents such as the *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* document (Department of Children & Youth Affairs, 2011). In addition, developing initiatives that seek to reduce societal stigmatisation of these families could also be of benefit.

The current research has identified a number of ways in which the Department of Justice and Equality (including the statutory bodies and non-statutory agencies working under the aegis of the Department) could reduce some of the negative repercussions of paternal incarceration for children of offenders.

These include:

- the IPS continuing to facilitate (and extending the use of) parenting skills training programmes for fathers in prison, their children and their children's mothers, such as the *Parents Plus* programme being run at the time of writing in Wheatfield Prison.¹⁰⁴ These should ideally focus on issues such as the administering of effective discipline and strengthening the parenting alliance.
- the IPS extending its use of the *Storybook Dads* scheme to all prisons in the jurisdiction and introducing other schemes or alternative forms of contact that create opportunities for or allow children to interact with their fathers, especially in academic ways.
- the IPS ensuring that search procedures and prison visiting areas are as "child-friendly" as possible and that prison officers are appropriately trained to deal with children in a sensitive manner.
- the Courts Service paying particular heed to the needs of children and trying to minimise their distress by, for example, ensuring that the timing of confinement does not coincide with important events in their lives.
- *An Garda Síochána* ensuring that arrest procedures take particular account of children and the potentially detrimental effects witnessing a fathers' (or mothers') arrest can have on their wellbeing and, as with prison officers, that Gardaí are appropriately trained to deal with children in a sensitive manner.

Of course, exploring and introducing alternatives to imprisonment for offenders (ie, those who pose little or no threat to society) would also be a step (albeit most likely a controversial one) towards attempting to reduce the number of children whose lives are affected by paternal and maternal incarceration. To this end, the Swedish system might offer some guidance in the form of practical options. (For a review of alternative sanctions imposed by the Swedish Prison and Probation Service, see Ryan-Mangan, 2014a, especially pp. 15-16.)

¹⁰⁴ *Parents Plus* was run as part of a family intervention pilot programme – *Family Links* – in Limerick Prison from October 2014 to 2016 (Childhood Development Initiative, 2017). *Family Links* was implemented by the Childhood Development Initiative, in partnership with the Irish Prison Service, the Parents Plus Charity, Bedford Row Family Agency and the Irish Penal Reform Trust (Bradshaw & Muldoon, 2017). After the programme's success in Limerick, plans were made to expand its use in other prisons, including Wheatfield Place of Detention, Castlerea Prison and the Midlands Prisons.

Given the extensive range of challenges children face when fathers are incarcerated, the development of any future initiatives involving this group should involve extensive cross-departmental collaboration (particularly among the Department of Justice and Equality, the DES and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs) and be research-driven. For instance, a specialised support service might be developed for children with incarcerated fathers and their families in order to minimise harm to children in the ways described here. Ideally, this would be a “one-stop shop”, in that, mothers/carers and children could access everything from counselling or emotional support services to information about financial entitlements and prison visiting procedures. Given the increased demands on mothers’/carers’ time, such services should be easily accessible, for example, online or phone-based. As Thelma stated, ‘Don’t be expecting them to walk with two buggies on a rainy day down to some remote centre [because they will not]’.

The DES also has a role to play. While the teachers interviewed and discussed in this research generally appeared to be handling these children’s situations with great sensitivity and care, it does not seem appropriate that they are put in the situation of having to fulfil such roles or assume such responsibilities, or indeed that it is fair that they are expected to do so without the relevant training or the specific knowledge required (McCrickard & Flynn, 2015). To this end, although the provision of a school psychologist in each school would ultimately be the best way to ensure these children get the emotional support they clearly appear to require, providing relevant training to teachers would at least go some way towards assisting them in their efforts to support this specific group. In 2012 Martyn highlighted the need for training to ‘sensitise teachers to the particular needs and vulnerabilities of children with a parent/parents in prison’ (p. 5). Five years later, this remains to be addressed in Ireland, while such training courses are running elsewhere (see, for example, the UK’s *Hidden Sentence* training course developed by *Action for Prisoners’ and Offenders’ Families* as part of the *Family Lives* organisation). In addition, continuing to facilitate (and perhaps even extending) the HSCL programme is another way in which the Department could assist these families and, specifically, these children. While acknowledging the considerable cost (to taxpayers) of such provisions, I deem it necessary to point out the fact that supporting

children in this manner has the potential to reduce the prison population in the future by steering children away from criminality and discouraging intergenerational offending. When one considers the cost of committing just one offender to prison and tending to his basic needs there – an annual cost that ranges from €42,657 in open prisons to €97,824 in high-security prisons (exclusive of any rehabilitative measures taken post-release; IPS, 2016) - educational interventions might seem a more cost effective (and desirable) alternative to the current situation.

Finally, the media must be reminded of the vulnerable nature of offenders' children and act accordingly when it comes to reporting about crimes or sentencing outcomes, remembering that the media is a powerful entity that is capable of influencing, amongst other things, society's views of families affected by incarceration.

10.3.2 Implications for teachers

First and foremost, in light of the fact that school can often be the only constant aspect of these children's lives, attempts should be made to ensure that a stable environment (with clear rules and expectations) is provided. Teachers must be mindful of the possibility of interpersonal expectancy effects being applicable to children with imprisoned fathers (and mothers). While it may be difficult to regulate one's expectations, the most reasonable request in this regard might be that teachers be conscious of their actions as Goldenberg concluded that, insofar as children's academic achievement is concerned, it matters less what teachers expect and more what they do (1992). Speaking to children about their bright futures and encouraging a sense of ambition could well have positive implications for children's approaches to schoolwork. In addition, although clearly vital aspects of children's wellbeing, emotional and physical considerations (as discussed in relation to Maslow's HoN) should not be allowed to overshadow the academic needs of children, as to do so could have detrimental consequences for children's future prospects.

There are a number of ways in which teachers and school staff more generally might assist children who are attempting to deal with a complex set of emotional (and behavioural) reactions to paternal imprisonment and shield them from any further distress (see, for example, Dillard, 2003; Roberts & Loucks, 2015; Moore, 1992; Ormiston Children & Families Trust, 2007; Vacca, 2008; Shillingford & Edwards, 2008; Petsch & Rochlen, 2009; Morgan et al., 2013). For instance, regularly making oneself available to speak or simply listen to children if/when required can provide them with a crucial source of support in an emotional sense. Particular attention should be afforded to children's emotional welfare before and after prison visits, when emotions tend to pose especially challenging.

Given children's typically negative perceptions of paternal incarceration and the apparent significance of their relationships with fathers, teachers need to be cognisant of the magnitude of those children's losses and act accordingly. For example, it might be obvious to state that the manner in which teachers and other children refer to a child's father or his absence can be important for a child, particularly one who views his/her father in a positive way; it can be upsetting to realise that others do not view him in the same positive light. I previously noted Beder's view that, 'when grief... [is] disenfranchised, mourning becomes complicated and prolonged' (2005, p. 260) and this would suggest that the trauma of losing a father through incarceration might be compounded if a child suspects that his/her loss is not rated as significant by those around him/her. Teachers need to be aware of the extended role they are (consciously or unconsciously) playing in these children's lives and refrain from making any judgements about children or their families. As Professor Brian Maguire stated in the RTÉ production *Outsiders*, 'The judgement is given by the court, not by the teacher' (McLoughlin & Haas, 2016). Finally, teaching emotional literacy skills and addressing the issues of emotional and mental wellbeing through programmes such as the *FRIENDS for Life* programme can equip children with vital skills and introduce them to a range of effective strategies they can use to express or otherwise process their emotions.

Given that open and honest communication between home and school has been shown to have the potential to be of benefit to children of incarcerated fathers, the forging of strong and meaningful home-school links should be a priority. Epstein & Dauber claim that teachers who have more positive attitudes to parental involvement are more successful 'in involving "hard-to-reach" parents' (1991, p. 293) and others have suggested that parents need to feel invited by teachers (and their children; Hollins, 2016) to be a part of their children's education teams (Christenson, 2003). Thus, initiation of contact by teachers could seem to be a very valuable first step in encouraging the development of effective partnerships between home and school. As stated in the Irish Primary Curriculum, this might involve 'reach[ing] out to help some parents overcome any inhibiting attitudes they may have' in this regard (Department of Education and Science, 1999, p. 22).

10.3.3 Implications for parents

Firstly, the importance of offering honest and age-appropriate explanations to children regarding their fathers' absence has been highlighted by this and numerous other pieces of research (see, for example, Poehlmann, 2005b). A child's sense of security should be of paramount concern. Thus, explanations should assure children that there is a (fair) system in operation, thereby dispelling any notions that things are out of control. Insofar as is possible, attempts should be made to maintain a stable environment for children at home and disruptions should be kept to a minimum.

In attempting to minimise the emotional effect of paternal incarceration on children, parents must be mindful of the influence of (and tend to) their own emotional states. As Monica put it: '[If] you don't work on yourself [you] can't help your children'. Encouraging children to speak about their anxieties or find healthy outlets through which to express their emotions might reduce behavioural manifestations of emotional maladjustment that could otherwise compromise their academic lives by having negative impacts on social or academic outcomes. It is of particular importance that emotional support be provided before, during and after prison visits. With regard to visits, the "rollercoaster" of emotions children sometimes experience at these times visits might be mitigated by taking a number of steps.

In Figure 6, I have highlighted the elements over which parents could exert some control and/or emotions that potentially could be eliminated from the cycle. Firstly, being clear in stating the purpose (and the outcomes) of visits may serve to reduce confusion and any anxiety they can cause. Second, being honest and open with schools and peers could allay some of the fears children often have in relation to prison visits and extend a child's support system through the strengthening of home-school links. Having said this, in the case of peers being aware of fathers' imprisonment at least, it might be that the cure may be worse than the disease and so parental discretion would be of paramount importance in this regard.

Although it does not come from my research, or any research for that matter, being an anecdote or incident described in a semi-autobiographical novel, it is worth pausing to consider how prison visiting can have lasting effects on children by considering the following. In the novel *A Child of the Jago* by Arthur Morrison [1863-1945], widely regarded as a classic account of late nineteenth-century slum and criminal life and partly based on personal experience of childhood in an impoverished district of London, twelve-year-old Dicky Perrot and his younger sister, known as Em, visit their habitual criminal father in prison (1982). 'Dicky felt that if he had been younger he would have cried... [and] little Em [was left] carrying into later years a memory of father as a man who lived in a cage' (Morrison, 1982, p. 161). Much might have changed in both British/Irish sentencing and prison visiting in the years since (Josh Perrott, the father, is released from a four year term for robbery with violence, promptly kills the man responsible for his imprisonment in the first place and is subsequently executed for having done so; and the visit is described as being conducted through 'a double iron railing covered with wire-netting... [amidst] a screaming hubbub of questions and answer[s]' [p. 161]), but the child left with the impression of her father as man who lived in a cage remains poignant.

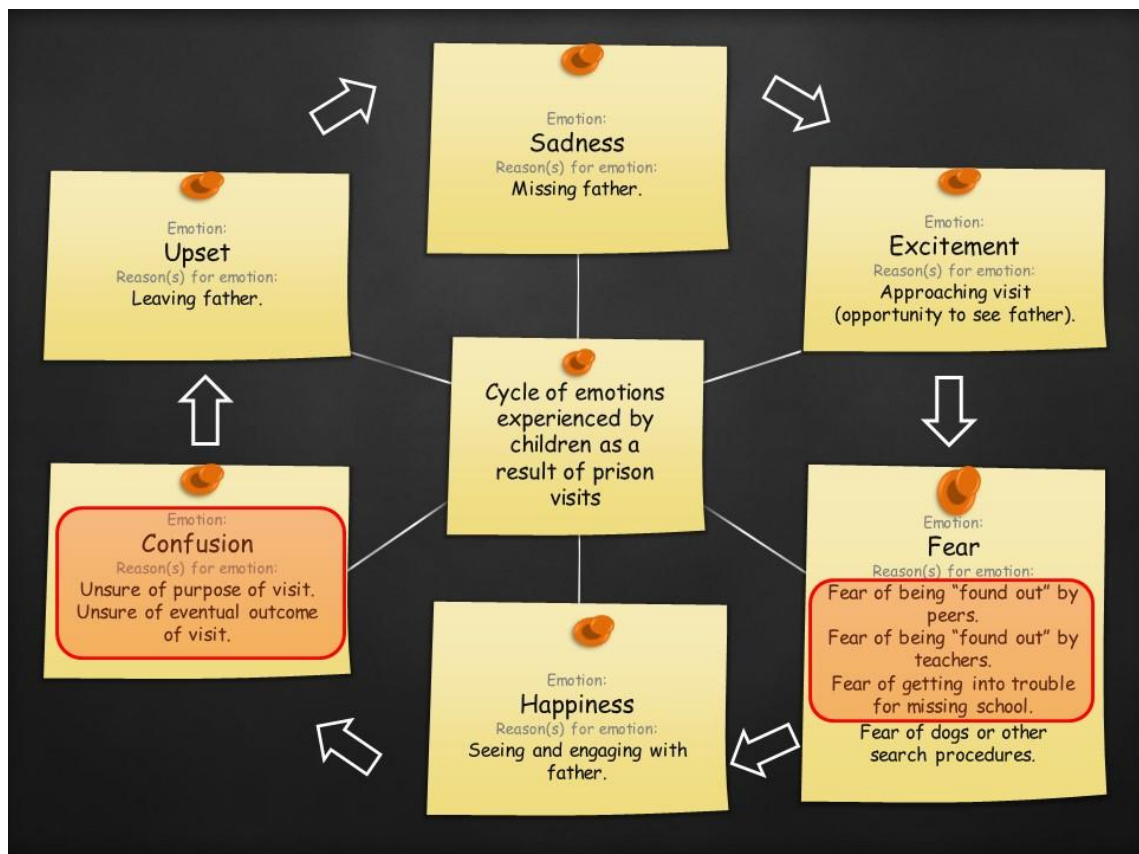


Figure 6 Cycle of emotions experienced by children before, during and after prison visits – potentially eliminable emotions

It is clear that effective parenting skills and consistent discipline are important for children's adjustment. Thus, through setting clear boundaries, implementing fair punishments when necessary, refraining from spoiling children and working to enhance parenting alliances, parents might obviate some unnecessary problems in this regard. In addition, a child's role in the household should be appropriate to his/her developmental stage and should not interfere improperly with academic or social pursuits. Being conscious of the impact that parental expectations can have on children and their academic lives, displaying positive attitudes to school and learning, speaking to children about their aspirations for the future and encouraging ambition might prove to be beneficial insofar as children's approaches to schoolwork are concerned.

10.4 Concluding comments

In 1965, Friedman and Esselstyn found ‘more than suggestive evidence... that committing a father to jail is soon accompanied by a depression in the school performance of his children – not alone academically, but in all other particulars as well’.¹⁰⁵ So many years later it seems unfortunate that so few studies subsequently have examined the issue of paternal incarceration from an educational viewpoint and even fewer have explored the academic lives of affected children in such a comprehensive or all-encompassing manner. Accepting that early educational experiences in pre- and primary school can have profound implications for children’s later life course trajectories and that paternal incarceration can exert influences on children’s academic lives that can thus either hinder or enhance their future prospects, it is imperative that priority or, at least, attention be given to these children at all levels of society.

In this concluding chapter, I feel it is important to reiterate that this study was not intended to, and therefore does not, make any broad claims to generalisation with regard to its findings. Consistent with Genty’s appeal for people to move beyond stereotypes insofar as this population is concerned (2012), the group of participants I encountered and the people for whom they spoke were quite diverse and the heterogeneity in their experiences was reflected in the varying consequences of paternal incarceration for these families’ lives and, specifically, children’s academic lives. Essentially, the ‘average picture’ (Clear, 2007, p. 96) should not be permitted to conceal the disparity among families of incarcerated men, to oversimplify the impact(s) incarceration can have or to encourage a “one-size-fits-all” approach to intervention (Morgan et al., 2013). Quite simply put, what I aspired to at the outset of this study was, through describing the details of these children’s experiences, to enable teachers and other professionals working with children of incarcerated fathers (and possibly mothers) to have a body of insights on which they could draw. If these insights can inform future practice on the part of those attempting to support this group of children, I have succeeded.

¹⁰⁵ By ‘particulars’, Friedman and Esselstyn were referring to the traits on which students were rated (on a ‘five-step continuum’) by teachers – age, achievement, attitude, sociability, acceptability (towards school), companions, temperament, self-concept, health, participation, view towards school, attendance, school’s influence, economic status and family interest (1965).

I conclude with Tracy's optimistic aspirations for Ben's future, which formed my title. Speaking of his father's incarceration, she expressed what one can only hope to be true of the thousands of Irish children in similar circumstances when she said, 'He can still lead a fantastic life... It'll always be a part of him but it's not going to define him'.

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Appendix 1 – List of participants

Participant pseudonym	Participant type	Date (of interview or receipt of account)
Fergal	Father	July 21, 2015
Flynn	Father	July 21, 2015
Frank	Father	July 21, 2015
Finbar	Father	August 13, 2015
Fred	Father	August 13, 2015
Fintan	Father	August 13, 2015
Melissa	Mother	July 21, 2015
Mary	Mother	December 7, 2015
Monica	Mother and support group staff member	March 3, 2016
Melanie	Mother	March 3, 2016
Carol*	Carer (grandmother)	January 18, 2016
Thelma	Teacher	January 4, 2016
Teresa	Teacher	January 13, 2016
Tara	Teacher	February 16, 2016
Tom	Teacher	March 9, 2016
Tracy	Teacher	June 24, 2016
Tess	Teacher	July 1, 2016
Stacey	Support group staff member and therapist	October 28, 2015
Sarah	Support group staff member	March 3, 2016
Sally	Support group staff member	March 3, 2016
Garrett	General practitioner	February 27, 2017
Barry*	Son of incarcerated father	October 28, 2015 (received)
Ben*	Son of incarcerated father	June 24, 2016 (received)

* Denotes participants who provided written accounts.

Appendix 2 – Consent forms

Consent form: Type A (Fathers)

Date: ____/____/201__	Number: _____	Please tick if you agree
1. I know what this research is about. (I have read the information sheet or it has been read to me.)		
2. I have had the chance to think and ask questions about the research.		
3. I know that I don't have to be interviewed if I don't want to.		
4. I know that if I sign this form I agree to be asked questions and have my answers recorded/written down.		
5. If I change my mind during the interview and don't want to be involved, I know I can stop and anything that was recorded or written down will be destroyed.		
6. I know that I do not have to answer all the questions I am asked and that, if I don't want to answer a question, I don't have to say why. I can just ask Ashling to skip to the next one.		
7. I know my real name will not be used at all during this research and that I will not be able to be identified in any research report.		
8. I know that my answers are confidential and anonymous unless there is reason to believe that either I or someone else may be in danger ¹ .		
9. I know I can contact Ashling at a later date if I have any queries/concerns about the research or what I said, or if I decide I don't want my answers to be used.		
10. I give Ashling permission to use information (opinions, feelings, stories, quotes, etc.) from me in her thesis, research/conference papers and reports.		

I understand the information I have been given and I want to take part in this research.

Signed: _____

Name in block capitals: _____

Date: _____



¹ In line with Exception to Confidentiality set out in the Irish Prison Service Ethics Guidance Document.

Consent form: Type B (Mothers/Carers)

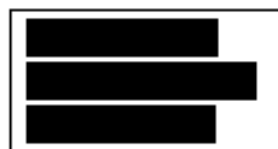
Date: ____/____/201__	Number: _____	Please tick if you agree
1. I know what this research is about. (I have read the information sheet or it has been read to me.)		
2. I have had the chance to think and ask questions about the research.		
3. I know that I don't have to be interviewed if I don't want to.		
4. I know that if I sign this form I agree to be asked questions and have my answers recorded/written down.		
5. If I change my mind during the interview and don't want to be involved, I know I can stop and anything that was recorded or written down will be destroyed.		
6. I know that I do not have to answer all the questions I am asked and that, if I don't want to answer a question, I don't have to say why. I can just ask Ashling to skip to the next one.		
7. I know my real name will not be used at all during this research and that I will not be able to be identified in any research report.		
8. I know that my answers are confidential and anonymous unless there is reason to believe that either I or someone else may be in danger ¹ .		
9. I know I can contact Ashling at a later date if I have any queries/concerns about the research or what I said, or if I decide I don't want my answers to be used.		
10. I give Ashling permission to use information (opinions, feelings, stories, quotes, etc.) from me in her thesis, research/conference papers and reports.		

I understand the information I have been given and I want to take part in this research.

Signed: _____

Name in block capitals: _____

Date: _____



¹ In line with Exception to Confidentiality set out in the Irish Prison Service Ethics Guidance Document.

Consent form: Type C (Parental consent for children)

Date: ____/____/201__	Number: _____	Please tick if you understand
1. I understand that Ashling is a researcher at Trinity College Dublin and that the information my child gives to her will never be used for anything other than her research into the experiences of children whose fathers are in prison.		
2. My child does ☐ / does not ☐ know about his/her father's imprisonment and I understand that Ashling will respect my wishes and will not divulge any information unknown to my child regarding this. I have given Ashling details about what he/she knows and does not know (see separate page).		
3. I realise that I am required to be present during my child's interview(s).		
4. I have read the information sheet and I have had time to think about the information. I understand the nature of Ashling's research and she has answered all questions that I wanted answers to.		
5. I understand that my child does not have to take part in this research and that, by signing this form I am giving consent (of my own free will) for him/her to do so if he/she is agreeable.		
6. I understand that my child's answers will be completely anonymous. I understand that my child's name will never be used by Ashling in the course of this research (except when she is speaking to my child directly). If there is reason to believe that either my child or someone else may be in danger, Ashling can help to direct my child to somebody who can help, if this is what he/she wants.		
7. I understand that my child does not have to answer all the questions he/she is asked and that, if he/she don't want to answer a question, he/she does not have to give a reason. My child simply can ask Ashling to skip to the next one and he/she will be told this before the interview starts.		
8. I understand that my child will be told that he/she can stop the interview at any stage by simply telling Ashling that he/she doesn't want to continue. Again, your child doesn't have to explain why.		
9. I realise that Ashling wants this interview to be a comfortable conversation which will help her to understand my child's point of view. So he/she will be asked to tell Ashling if he/she feels stressed or uncomfortable and we can stop or postpone the interview (whichever your child prefers).		
10. I realise that it is important that my child understands all the questions fully and that he/she will be invited to ask Ashling if he/she is unsure about anything.		
11. I understand that the answers my child gives to questions will never be stored with his/her name so that it is impossible for anybody other than Ashling to know who said what.		

12. I understand that Ashling will use this information to write/inform her thesis, research papers and articles and that she will destroy the interview notes immediately once these are completed.	
13. I understand that Ashling wishes to record our interview so that <i>she alone</i> can listen to it to make sure that what she writes is accurate and that she will delete all recordings once her research is finished. However, if my child or I have a problem with this I understand that Ashling will respect this and, instead, take notes. I understand that Ashling will not use my child's name while recording interviews.	
14. I understand that until Ashling's research is finished all documents and recordings, when not in use, will be locked in a place to which she alone has the key or saved on a device which is protected by a password that only she knows.	
15. I realise that Ashling might include information or quotes from my child in her research papers, reports, and/or thesis and when she is talking at conferences. I understand that she will never use my child's name in such cases and, bearing this in mind, I give her permission to do so.	

I am satisfied that I understand all of the above statements and I would like my child to take part in this research. I give my consent for any information (opinions, feelings, stories, quotes, etc.) that my child provides during my interview to be used for the purposes and in the manner described above.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Researcher: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED] Phone number: [REDACTED]

Consent form: Type D (Professionals)

Date: ____/____/201__	Number: _____	Please tick if you understand
1. I have read the information sheet provided and I have had time to reflect on the information contained within it.		
2. I understand that the information I give to Ashling will never be used for anything other than her research into the experiences of children with incarcerated fathers.		
3. I understand the nature of Ashling's research and have received answers to all of the questions I wanted to ask.		
4. I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in this research and that, by signing this form I am agreeing to do so of my own free will.		
5. I understand that my answers will be completely anonymous. I understand that my name will never be used by Ashling in the course of this research (except when she is speaking to me directly).		
6. I understand that I do not have to answer all the questions I am asked and that I am under no obligation to give a reason if I do not wish to answer one or more questions. I simply can ask Ashling to skip to the next one.		
7. I understand that I can stop the interview at any stage by simply telling Ashling that I don't want to continue. Again, I am not required to give a reason.		
8. I realise that Ashling wants this interview to be a comfortable conversation which will help her to understand my point of view and that of the children involved. So if I feel stressed or uncomfortable, I will let her know and we can stop or postpone the interview (whichever I prefer).		
9. I realise that it is important that I understand all the questions fully and that I should ask Ashling if I am unsure about anything.		
10. I understand that the answers I give to questions will never be stored with my name so that it is impossible for anybody other than Ashling to know who said what.		
11. I understand that Ashling will use this information to write/inform her thesis, research papers and articles and that she will destroy the interview notes immediately once these are completed.		

12. I understand that Ashling wishes to record our interview so that <i>she alone</i> can listen to it to make sure that what she writes is accurate and that she will delete all recordings once her research is finished. I understand that Ashling will not use my name while recording interviews. However, if I do not wish to be recorded I understand that Ashling will respect this and, instead, take notes.	
13. I understand that until Ashling's research is finished all documents and recordings, when not in use, will be locked in a place to which she alone has the key or saved on a device which is protected by a password that only she knows.	
14. I realise that Ashling might include information or quotes from me in her research papers, reports, and/or thesis and when she is talking at conferences. I understand that she will <u>never</u> use my name in such cases and, bearing this in mind, I give her permission to do so.	

I am satisfied that I understand all of the above statements and I would like to take part in this research. I give my consent for any information (opinions, feelings, stories, quotes, etc.) that I provide during my interview to be used for the purposes and in the manner described above.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Researcher: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone number: [REDACTED]