Northumbria Research Link

The intergenerational traumatic impact of maternal imprisonment

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Abstract

Maternal imprisonment is an often-overlooked area of prison research due to the smaller number of individuals it concerns. However, the impact of sending a mother to prison can be wide-ranging and go far beyond the individual mother. This research took a qualitative narrative approach to examine the wider traumatic impact of maternal imprisonment. Using a socio-ecological framework, informed by trauma theory, the research conceptualizes maternal imprisonment as causing intergenerational trauma, using a definition of trauma that encompasses individual, family, community, and societal factors.

10 interviews were carried out with staff working with mothers in the community and 19 interviews with mothers who had experienced a period of imprisonment in the North East of England. The research found that the majority of mothers had experienced prior trauma in their lives, and that the experience of prison was traumatic for both themselves and their families. The loss of the mothering role due to separation from children had enduring impacts beyond the period of imprisonment, coupled with the stigma of being a mother with a criminal record. Women recounted how prison had changed their sense of self, destroyed their relationships with their children, and those caring for them. They also experienced problems with housing, benefits, and employment.

This study shows the breadth and depth of the impact of maternal imprisonment by understanding trauma as something experienced at different levels, including individually, within the family and the wider community and society. It shows how trauma is both experienced directly by children and kinship carers in addition to mothers and passed on vicariously through damage to relationships and family living arrangements. The study uses intergenerational trauma as a way of describing these harms across the generations, showing the enormous impact of maternal imprisonment that generally outweighs the punishment for what are usually minimal non-violent offences.

Contents

List of figures and tables

List of abbreviations

ABH	Actual Bodily Harm
ACCT	Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork
ACE	Adverse Childhood Experience
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
BAME	Black and Minority Ethnic
BASS	Bail Accommodation Support Services
CJS	Criminal Justice System
CRC	Community Rehabilitation Company
DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual
DV/DVA	Domestic violence/Domestic violence and abuse
HDC	Home Detention Curfew
HMIP	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons
HMP	Her Majesty's Prison
HMPPS	Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service
IBS	Irritable Bowel Syndrome
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
MBU	Mother and Baby Unit
NPS	National Probation Service
NRC	National Research Council
OASYS	Offender Assessment system
PND	Postnatal Depression
PSI	Prison Service Instruction
PSO	Prison Service Order
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
SEN	Special educational needs
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US/USA	United States/United States of America
VAWG	Violence against women and girls

Acknowledgements

Author's declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others. Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the University Ethics Committee on 23/08/18 and HMPPS National Research Council on 22/09/19.

I declare that the word count of this thesis is 79,862 words.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Justification for the study

Although women in prison make up only a relatively small amount of the total prison population in the majority of countries, it has long been argued that they have specific needs and vulnerabilities that are different to those of men (Corston, 2007, p. 33). In particular, the fact that many women in prison are mothers and grandmothers and are often the main carer for dependent children, is of great significance (Caddle and Crisp, 1997). Initial research and activism around issues concerning women in prison in England began in the early nineteenth century, most famously by Elizabeth Fry (Fry, 1827). At that time no central authority had responsibility for prisons and, consequently, no government inspections of them took place. Elizabeth Fry drew attention to the conditions being endured by women in prison and became the first female penal reformer (Rose, 1980). In the UK, this work has been continued by campaigning groups such as Women in Prison (see below) and philanthropists such as Lady Edwina Grosvenor and her charity, One Small Thing .

A growing body of work has emerged concerning various aspects of both female offending and female incarceration. The first study of a women's prison was that of Giallombardo (1966) with 'Society of Women', which was a comprehensive examination of an adult female prison in the USA. In the UK, Pat Carlen has continued to highlight issues concerning women in the criminal justice system (Carlen, 1983; Carlen, 1998; Carlen, 2004), alongside the campaigning group she founded with Chris Tchaikovsky, Women in Prison (Women in Prison). The body of literature concerning women in prison, and more recently, the families of women in prison, has continued to grow highlighting issues around secondary prisonisation, the vulnerabilities of women in prison, and concerns around the separation of mothers and children (Corston, 2007; Comfort, 2008; Minson, 2019a). More recently, issues surrounding the prior trauma that women in the criminal justice system may have experienced have been brought to the fore (Green *et al.*, 2005; Greene, Haney and Hurtado, 2000; Cook *et al.*, 2005). This has led to 'trauma informed practice' being utilised in many different health and social care environments and, more recently, within the criminal justice system itself (Petrillo, Thomas and Hanspal, 2019; Covington, 2015).

This study aims to understand the experiences of mothers in the prison system through the concept of 'intergenerational trauma' as a way of understanding the breadth and long-lasting impact that maternal imprisonment has, and the wider impact on children and families. Using a socio-ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), that

understands trauma as something that is experienced both by individuals and, experienced by families and communities with individual, structural and systemic causes, it increases our understanding of the harms caused by maternal imprisonment. This can make a contribution to knowledge on both on a theoretical level and from new empirical findings regarding the causes and impacts of imprisonment on mothers. This knowledge can be used to improve services to support mothers and their families involved in the criminal justice system.

1.2 The modern prison: treatment versus punishment

Although prison is often seen as the primary way of dealing with people who have committed serious offences, this was not always the case. In the 16th and 17th centuries punishment was generally meted out on the body in the form of physical acts such as flogging, hanging, mutilation and execution (Morris and Rothman, 1998). Prisons were generally only used as holding places whilst people were awaiting punishment and were not considered to be the punishment itself. The move away from public, physical forms of punishment came as public support for these acts waned; some parts of society felt they also undermined public order (Matthews, 1999). The modern prison emerged from previous institutions of confinement such as workhouses, bridewells and local jails, with the opening of Pentonville prison in the 1840s (Matthews, 1999).

Today the use of imprisonment as punishment is widespread and, in many countries, increasing rapidly. It has been argued that this has been led by neo-liberal policies in countries such as the USA, where an emphasis on individual responsibility and a removal of welfare benefits has resulted in the 'penalization of poverty' (Wacquant, 2009). There remain concerns, regarding the purpose of imprisonment and its legitimacy as a means of dealing with offenders and maintaining social order. As people are detained in greater numbers in many countries, including the UK and the USA, these questions and arguments become more pressing. In many countries across the world, people from minority groups continue to be disproportionately represented in the prison system. Prisons therefore detain a high proportion of disadvantaged and marginalised individuals. For instance, in the USA, Black and Hispanic people are overrepresented in the prison population and in Australia 29% of prisoners are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020). In England and Wales, 27% of the prison population are from BAME groups, as compared to 13% of the general population (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, 2020).

Prison has been understood as holding a number of different and sometimes competing purposes. This includes incapacitation, punishment or retribution, deterrence and rehabilitation. Increasingly, it is clear that neo-liberal approaches to penal practices place an emphasis on individualism, responsibilisation and accountability. Prison therefore aims to reform and treat individuals, but then sends them back out into the same disadvantaged situation in society, with its same problems. These issues are rarely acknowledged by penal policy, but instead, individuals are decontextualized from their lives. For women, in particular, who are more likely to have experienced prior trauma in their lives, the competing ideals of punishment and treatment within the prison cause tension and contradiction (Comack, 2018). Whether traumatized women can receive appropriate treatment whilst in a place of punishment therefore becomes an important question. Maternal imprisonment extends far beyond just the individual concerned, leading to huge disruption for children, grandparents and wider family members in many cases. The cost of this disruption rarely seems justifiable when the crimes of these mothers are taken into account, as this research will outline.

1.3 Women's imprisonment in England and Wales

Historically, women have often been subject to imprisonment for petty crimes, that related to their failure to live up to the moral standards of the time for women, such as soliciting, sexual promiscuity, concealment of pregnancy and consumption of alcohol (Dobash and Dobash, 1986). There is evidence that gendered ideas of women and mothers are still an influence on sentencing and how women are treated in prison. Women still account for a high proportion of those prosecuted for failure to have a television licence, and of those prosecuted for child truancy (Ministry of Justice, 2017). There is a danger that such prosecutions lead to further involvement in the criminal justice system for women, potentially including custodial sentences. The need to imprison women and break up families for offences such as this is questionable. In the 1970s, women who committed crime were often seen as mentally deficient or insane, and the use of psychoactive medication became prevalent. Holloway Prison in central London, for example, was specifically rebuilt as a secure hospital based on these ideals (Moore and Scraton, 2014). The first published study of a women's prison was carried out by Giallombardo (1966); this was partly a response to studies within the sphere of male prisons (Sykes, 1958). It detailed how females in custody coped with prison life by forming attachments and family groupings, and also examined the prison subculture. It was subsequently criticised by some for its focus on same-sex

relationships within the prison setting, suggesting that the importance of this was somewhat overemphasised.

Another influential writer in this field is Pat Carlen, who has written extensively on women's experiences of prison, pathways to prison and alternatives to prison (Carlen, 1983; Carlen, 2004). Examining the imprisonment of men and women, it is clear that women endure a number of disadvantages due to their gender, and therefore their smaller representation within the prison population as a whole. As there are fewer women's establishments in the prison estate, there is a higher likelihood that women will be sent further away from home. In addition, there are only six mother and baby units in England (and none in Wales), so lack of access to these services impacts further on this problem. There are also fewer opportunities for employment, education, and other rehabilitative services available within the female estate, primarily due to the smaller numbers of women. Some research has suggested that historically petty rules are more likely to be enforced in women's prisons and that expected standards of behaviour are higher (Carlen, 1983).

It remains the case that most women sentenced to imprisonment (83%) have not committed violent crimes and do not pose a significant risk to society (Prison Reform Trust, 2018b). The majority of crimes that women commit are acquisitive, concerning money and providing for the family (Ministry of Justice, 2019b). In many cases, women are imprisoned for short sentences or are recalled to prison for breaching a community order (Ministry of Justice, 2018b). Even these short sentences often lead to the loss of housing and employment and result in separation from children and family. Even a short separation can be incredibly harmful for mothers and their children, and make it increasingly difficult for them to rebuild their lives on release (Baldwin and Epstein, 2017). BAME women are 28% more likely to be imprisoned than white women in England and Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2019b), and may face additional stigma and discrimination whilst in the prison system (Cox, 2017). Many foreign national women are imprisoned due to drugs offences, such as drug trafficking and often there has been significant coercion involved (Bosworth, 2011). The United States has seen a large increase in the number of women in prison in recent years, due to changes in drugs laws and the introduction of mandatory minimum sentencing for drug offences (DeHart, Shapiro and Clone, 2018).

Research into women's mental health in prison, suggests that women are affected by mental ill-health more than male prisoners, and more than those in the general population and this has remained the case for a considerable time (Corston, 2007;

Bartlett and Hollins, 2018). There is also a suggestion that the prison system is designed 'by men for men' and is not really set up to meet the needs of women which can be quite different (Corston, 2007). For instance, it may be that women tend to turn their violence inwards rather than directing it towards other people, which can have potentially longer term and more damaging effects. Women are also more likely than men to have experienced significant prior trauma in their lives (Green *et al.*, 2005; Cook *et al.*, 2005). This is reflected in the higher number of self-harm incidents recorded for women in prison (Ministry of Justice, 2021b).

In 2007, the seminal report by Baroness Corston (Corston, 2007) brought issues surrounding female offenders and their needs to the forefront. It called for a rethink of the way in which women's needs were met both in custody and the community, recommending that custodial sentences be restricted to only those women who posed a serious risk to the public. It highlighted the vulnerability of many women involved in the criminal justice system, detailing how up to 80% of women in prison have mental health needs. Over ten years later, the Female Offender Strategy (Ministry of Justice, 2018a), outlines current government policy in the area of women who have offended. It describes the government's aims to impose fewer short custodial sentences on women and for less women to enter the criminal justice system overall. It recommends early intervention but has been criticised for not committing adequate funds to achieve this. The strategy proposes that community orders in particular, should be increased, in partnership with the third sector. Again, it is unclear how the third sector will be funded: it is greatly underfunded at present, with many small organisations relying on small grant funds that are short term. The strategy places great emphasis on locally led joined up working as a way of delivering services suited to the specific needs of women involved in the criminal justice system in each locality.

The number of women in prison increased by over 50% between 1995 and 2010 but has since remained around the 4000 mark in recent years. There are currently around 3100 women in prison in England and Wales, which represents around 5% of the prison population (Ministry of Justice, 2021a). Current low numbers may be partially due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which led to some women being prioritised for early release. Of this total number it is likely that around two thirds of women in prison have dependent children, although this data is not routinely collected by the prison service; instead this is an estimate stemming from the only formal study to date (Caddle and Crisp, 1997). Estimates of the number of children whose mothers go to prison each year in England and Wales range between 2,544 and 17,240 (Ministry of Justice, 2019a; Kincaid, Roberts and Kane, 2019). This may be an underestimate, as it has

been suggested that some women do not disclose the fact that they have children, for fear of potential interventions from social services or harsher prison sentences (Ministry of Justice, 2019a). In terms of pregnant women in prison in England and Wales, again data is not routinely collected, although the death of a baby at HMP Bronzefield, when a woman on remand, gave birth alone in her cell in 2019, prompted the release of data stating that there were 47 pregnant women in the prison system at that time (the Guardian, 2019).

There are currently 12 prisons for women in England, and none in Wales (HM Prison and Probation Service, 2020). Since the closure of Holloway Prison in 2016, there is no prison for women in central London. Due to the smaller number of female prisoners, and therefore the smaller number of prisons, women are often held further away from their home area than male prisoners are. Data shows that on average, women are held 63 miles from home, compared to an average of 50 miles for men (Farmer, 2019), with a significant number being held more than 100 miles from home. For women who are mothers, this obviously holds major implications regarding their ability to receive visits from their partners and family and has an impact on their ability to maintain ties with their children.

Female prisoners are not categorised in the same way as men due to the smaller size of the female estate, as detailed in PSI 39/2011 (National Offender Management Service, 2011). Women are classified as either suitable for open or closed conditions, meaning that women are more likely to be held in a higher security establishment than is necessary. Some women may elect to stay in closed conditions if there are no open prisons near to their homes, friends and family. A small number of female prisoners are certified as Category A (sentenced) or restricted (remand) if they are deemed to pose a serious risk to the public (National Offender Management Service, 2011).

There are six mother and baby units (MBUs) in England, meaning that in many cases women must move further away from home and family in order to access one. For instance, in the North East of England there is no mother and baby unit, with the closest being in York (HMP Askham Grange) for those eligible for open conditions, or Wakefield (HMP New Hall). As outlined in PSI 49/2014 (National Offender Management Service, 2014), women may generally stay in a mother and baby unit with their child until he or she reaches the age of 18 months, although there is some flexibility in some units regarding this rule (National Offender Management Service, 2014). Currently, women who are pregnant in prison need to apply to access an MBU and, a decision is then made by prison staff and social services. Women cannot apply

until they are in prison and the process can take some time. If they are not accepted for a place in an MBU, they then need to make arrangements where possible for someone in the community to take over care of the child after they have given birth. There is currently no support, either financial or practical, for those caring for their children, to enable them to provide this care (House of Commons, 2019).

In general, women in custody have not been convicted of violent offences and are not a danger to society; the majority of women are convicted for theft, fraud and drugs offences (Ministry of Justice, 2019b). Some offence prosecutions still remain skewed towards women and interestingly, many of them relate to the family situation – namely television licence evasion (74% female), truancy (71% female), drunkenness in charge of a child (62%) and benefit fraud (55%) (Ministry of Justice, 2019b). It has been widely reported that women are often held in custody on short sentences which can still be extremely disruptive to family ties and often achieves very little (Baldwin and Epstein, 2017), as there is not enough time for interventions to occur in custody and it disrupts other supports in the community, including, in some cases, housing, employment and healthcare. Women are also more likely to be remanded in custody prior to sentencing, with a considerable proportion (two thirds) not going on to receive a custodial sentence (Howard League for Penal Reform, 2020). Considering that custody is meant to be reserved for serious offences, when there is no other option, it is surprising that so many women continue to be given custodial sentences in England and Wales. Although there have been many policy documents produced over the years, and attempts to make positive changes to the treatment of women who have offended (National Offender Management Service, 2013; National Offender Management Service, 2015), there are still many areas of concern that will be discussed in the following chapter.

The focus of this research study is on the effect of maternal imprisonment on family ties and in particular, the mother-child relationship. However, that is not to say that women in prison who are not mothers are not an important consideration for researchers. Michalsen and Flavin (2014) for example, examined the different needs of mothers and non-mothers in the prison system. There is some overlap between these groups, and the issues examined are not necessarily exclusive to mothers. It must also be noted that some women may not identify as mothers if they have lost children or had them removed, and others will not necessarily see 'mothering' or 'motherhood' as their primary role or identity. Maternal imprisonment has wide reaching impacts on relationships, including between mothers and children, partners, grandparents, and

siblings. The research will show how imprisonment affects many areas of mothers' lives, often for many years afterwards.

1.4 Research aims and objectives

Research was carried out in the North East of England with assistance from a Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) and a voluntary organisation. Interviews took place across the CRC area over a period of six months. I had previously been involved in supporting the delivery of women's hubs (for women on probation) in the area and, as part of the research process, reacquainted myself with the hubs by attending on a regular basis and engaging with the sessions. Nine out of 10 women on the CRC probation caseload within which the research took place are White British (HMI Probation, 2020) which meant that, due to the small-scale qualitative nature of the study, it was not possible to analyse the effects of maternal imprisonment on people of different ethnic backgrounds or other minority groupings.

The research was carried out using a framework influenced by feminist standpoint theory, trauma and socio-ecological theories (outlined in **Chapter 4**). The following section outlines the aims and research questions for the study. The study utilised prior knowledge as a practitioner and academic literature as a starting point and was also shaped by responses from the mothers and practitioners spoken to. The theoretical framework additionally provided a structure and focus to the direction of the study.

Figure 1.1: Theoretical framework for understanding maternal imprisonment
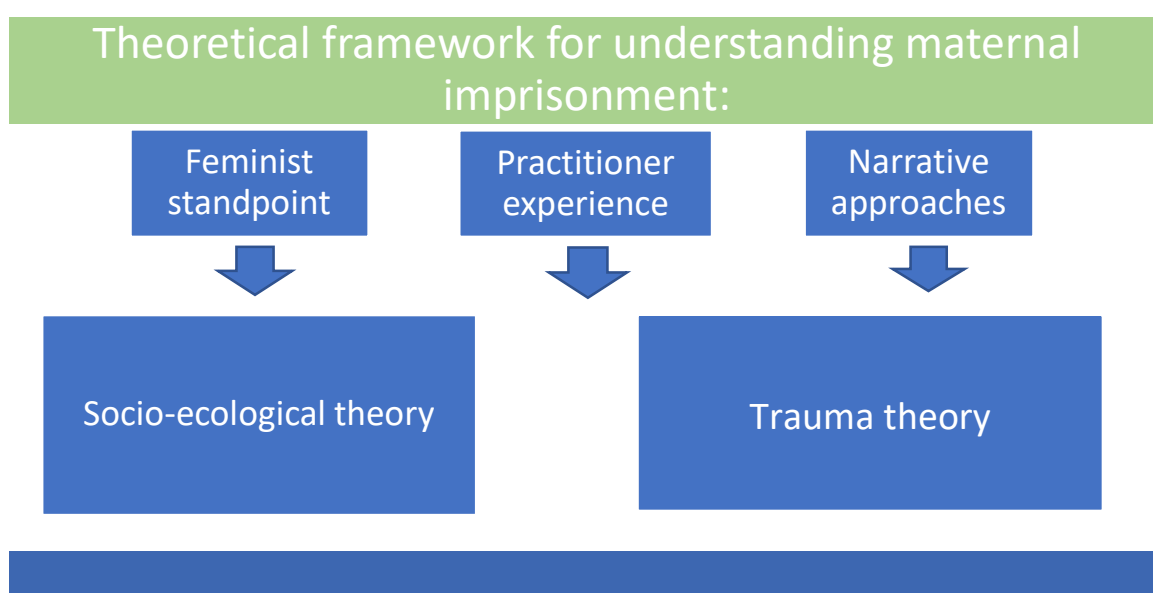
Aims:

• To explore the role of inter-generational trauma in the lives of mothers who have experienced prison.

• To identify how maternal imprisonment depletes the human and social resources of the family.

• To identify what is needed to support mothers in and after prison.

Primary research questions:

➢ What evidence is there of the existence of trauma in mother's lives prior to going to prison and what effect does it have?

➢ How are mother's lives affected by imprisonment and how do they maintain relationships with their children?

➢ Do the intergenerational harms of maternal imprisonment persist after the period of custody?

1.5 Researcher perspective

Immediately prior to beginning this research study, I had been working for a local women's mental health charity in the North East of England. My main role concerned working with survivors of domestic abuse, although I also worked with a group for women on probation. I had come to this career path via a route that had encompassed working with many different groups within both healthcare and education settings. This included time spent working with people with mental health needs and learning disabilities and also children and young people excluded from mainstream education. This was the first time I had worked solely with women, and I quickly began to see the complicated emotional difficulties they were experiencing on a daily basis. These were often tied up with family and relationship issues and were both acute and enduring.

As each week more women came through the doors, I began to feel to some extent frustrated that we were not able to do anything to stop these issues before they got to the point of someone seeking professional help for them. There were a number of times whilst working with the group for women on probation that women asked questions such as: "why did it have to come to this?", and "why did I need to get so low that I committed a crime to get any help?", or "I didn't know this kind of help existed before". Many of the women using our services had experienced trauma in some way, although neither we nor they did generally termed it as such: interpersonal violence, sexual violence, childhood abuse, stalking and harassment. Many had also become

estranged from their families and, in many cases, their children. Many of those on probation were using drugs and alcohol to deal with their emotional trauma. When it came to the end of their probation order, it was not uncommon for women to ask to continue attending the group, even though they were no longer required to. This was generally not permitted due to capacity; their places were needed for women who were formally required to attend. This illustrates the gaping holes in the support systems available for women experiencing isolation, poverty and emotional trauma. The women highly valued the friendships they made, the relationships with staff, and the personal growth that was possible in a supportive, female only environment.

I had not specifically intended to embark on an academic career; although I had delivered some teaching sessions to social work and midwifery students on domestic abuse issues, this was the only contact I had had with higher education for a long while. The scholarship offered by Lady Edwina Grosvenor in March 2018 seemed to bring together many threads of my previous work experience and held the possibility of finding out some answers to the questions I had from face-to-face work, and the opportunity to understand the theoretical arguments around these issues to join up with my practical knowledge. The original remit of the research was as follows:

"*the successful student will be offered the opportunity to develop a research proposal, (and carry out the aligned research) which evaluates, and challenges, contemporary understanding of intergenerational trauma, specifically on women. Women may themselves have experienced trauma earlier in life, or the impact of custody itself may be the source of trauma. There is also a focus on the intergenerational impact of parental imprisonment on the likelihood of children experiencing poor educational and mental health outcomes and engagement in substance misuse and crime. The successful student will look to identify mechanisms which will result in structural changes to limit the impact of intergenerational or community trauma (such as that which could be experienced because of imprisonment).*"

This research, therefore, is intended to add to the body of work that is slowly growing around women's imprisonment, but to do this using a new approach applying the concept of intergenerational trauma to embody the harms experienced by mothers and families. The socio-ecological approach allows us to see the wider traumas delivered by maternal imprisonment, in order to understand the interaction between individual, family, community and societal factors. I am not a prison abolitionist; however, I do feel strongly that many of the women currently held in our prisons would be far better

placed elsewhere and ideally supported in the community, where they can continue to experience their ties with children and family and experience improved life chances.

Whilst carrying out the study, I used the opportunity to work with two local charities and also the Community Rehabilitation Company, with criminalised women. I wanted to do this to extend my knowledge of the realities of women's lives and also to give a small part of my time back whilst I was carrying out the research. I am extremely grateful for these opportunities which again would not have been possible without the funded studentship. I volunteered for a year with a national charity, as a prison visitor, running a group for peri- and post-natal women in prison. I delivered training for a local voluntary organisation regarding the impact of imprisonment on families. I also attended women's hubs for women on probation across the local area, in association with another voluntary organisation and the local CRC. All of this added to the research experience and stopped it from being a purely academic exercise. I was clear that I wanted to include my practitioner experience in the process.

Unfortunately, the end of the research process and the writing up was somewhat hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic. I was lucky insofar as I had completed all of my data collection at that point, but I had been intending to deliver some sessions for women attending the probation hubs across the area to discuss some of the themes coming out of the research and trauma more widely. I managed to do one of these sessions in March 2020, just before the first lockdown began, but the others that I had booked in could not go ahead. I then had my two children at home with me off and on for much of the following year and the challenge of home-schooling and writing up my thesis, which was not exactly how I was intending it to go, but the following is the result of that fractured process.

1.6 Thesis layout

Following on from this introductory chapter, **Chapter 2** reviews policy in the area of women offenders since the Corston report to give a background to the issues relevant to this area. It goes on to consider in detail the concept of 'trauma' in relation to mothers involved in the criminal justice system. This includes considering research regarding prior trauma, and also defining the concept of 'intergenerational trauma'.

Chapter 3 reviews prior research regarding the impact of maternal imprisonment on children and families. It considers who the families of women in prison are, and how they are affected. This includes both direct impacts on the family and wider issues such as poverty and housing.

Chapter 4 defines the theoretical framework used in the study. It outlines the background to the socio-ecological approach used and how this has been developed, taking influence from key researchers in this field. It then considers how this can be related to women involved in the criminal justice system and why it is relevant to do this.

Research methodology is considered in **Chapter 5** with an outline of the decisions made, research design and data collection and analysis. This chapter also considers difficulties encountered and ethical issues that were accounted for. The mothers who took part in the research are introduced at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 6, the first of three findings chapters, presents data concerning the narratives of mothers, specifically focussing on the prior trauma present in their lives. It does this using a socio-ecological framework and outlining individual, family and community trauma.

The second findings chapter, **Chapter 7**, presents the traumatic experiences of prison for mothers and, in addition, considers the impact this had on their children and families.

The final findings chapter, **Chapter 8**, outlines evidence of the lasting impact of imprisonment on mothers. It details the issues that arose once women had returned to their families and communities.

Chapter 9 analyses the data in relation to the prior literature and research questions and gives a summary of the main findings. It also outlines the limitations of the research and makes recommendations for change.

Chapter 2: The role of trauma in maternal imprisonment

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a review of relevant policy affecting criminalised women, and in particular mothers, since the Corston report (Corston, 2007) which will be evaluated in order to understand the context and history of maternal imprisonment. A review of the literature concerning issues facing mothers in the prison system will also be given. This will centre on an overview of trauma within the context of maternal imprisonment, including a definition of how this concept will be utilised within the research project. This is followed by a review of literature regarding prior trauma and vulnerabilities, the impact of prison itself and the wider trauma inflicted on mothers by a custodial sentence. The following chapter will focus on how children and families are affected by maternal imprisonment (**Chapter 3**).

2.2 Women in prison: policy and context

2.2.1 Prisons and sentencing

Before the widespread introduction and acceptance of prison as a way of punishing those considered to have committed crimes, punishment tended to be more corporeal in nature. It was usually brutal, public and humiliating, generally enacted through painful bodily punishments. These included acts meant to torture such as the scold's bridle and ducking stool. Although there is some debate as to when exactly the widespread use of prison became the preferred form of punishment, many suggest it emerged as part of industrial capitalism as described by Foucault (1977), but there is also evidence of its use prior to this period. Although the prison is a different form of punishment to physical acts, it can still be envisaged as a physical as well as a psychological punishment.

Prison, it has been argued, has always had an element of social control, and particularly so for women (Carlen, 1983). Women who commit crime were often seen as mentally deficient, abnormal and morally corrupt. To this extent, even after release from prison, women were often subjected to prolonged control over their lives in the form of release into a supervised hostel (Codd, 2008). These ideas can still be witnessed today in terms of how the press and wider society react to female criminals, particularly with regard to violent or sexual offences. Heidensohn (Carlen and Worrall, 1987) discusses how women who offend are seen as 'doubly deviant' as they had committed an offence against both society and their gender. They are depicted as deviating from normal female behaviour and held responsible for the 'proper' behaviour

of both themselves and others, particularly within the domestic sphere. Mothers who have offended have therefore typically been viewed as morally, as well as criminally, corrupt. They have not just committed a criminal offence but an offence against their gender. This links in with the increased stigma attached to women and especially mothers who offend. To some extent for a male to go to prison is acceptable, but for a mother, society finds this more difficult to accept. Worrall (1990) also argues that female criminals were often seen either "as 'not women' or 'not criminals'" (p.31).

It has been suggested that although women make up a relatively small proportion of those committing offences, it may be that they are treated more harshly by the criminal justice system, with some offences in particular being heavily gendered and in some cases harsher sentences being meted out for first offences (Carlen, 2013). Offences such as truancy, non-possession of a television licence and being drunk in charge of a child are those that are disproportionately applied to women (Ministry of Justice, 2018b). Another issue which has recently been highlighted regards the use of short sentences for women and particularly mothers. Research has suggested that these sentences are extremely harmful, being disruptive to mother-child relationships, with little impact on reducing offending and limited time during the sentence to carry out any meaningful interventions (Baldwin and Epstein, 2017; Masson, 2019). Recent policy documents have stated that the use of short sentences should be reduced (Ministry of Justice, 2018a), but as yet there is little emerging evidence of substantial changes to sentencing practices.

2.2.2 Strategy and policy on women in the criminal justice system since the Corston report

The Corston report (Corston, 2007), which followed the death of six women in HMP Styal within the space of a year, was commissioned by the UK Government to examine the needs of vulnerable women involved in the criminal justice system. It identified the characteristics of women in prison, namely that they were often vulnerable due to issues such as domestic abuse, mental illness, substance misuse, poverty and unemployment. The report also argued that women were marginalised within a system which was in the main established to deal with male offenders and which was predominantly designed by men. It has become a major landmark in UK criminal justice policy.

The report called for a "radically different approach" (Corston, 2007, p. 29) to women in prison, including changes to strategic leadership and the replacement of women's prisons with smaller, local custodial premises. It reported that the use of imprisonment

for women was often disproportional to the severity of their offences and offered "no advantages at huge financial cost" (Corston, 2007, p. 8). 43 recommendations were made within the report, with 25 being accepted by the Government and another 14 being partially accepted. However, the resulting concrete action has been slow to materialise with many issues remaining and the female prison population currently remaining fairly static, with women continuing to be held in large establishments at some distance from home. Since the publication of the Corston report, there have been a number of official reports and reviews which are discussed below, including those which outline the strategic response the Government intends to make, but there remains a distinct gap between policy and practice.

The Bangkok Rules (UN General Assembly, 2010), which were adopted by the General Assembly in 2010, outlines a series of rules concerning the treatment of women prisoners and recommendations of non-custodial measures for women offenders. Although the UK government is guided by this, again there are gaps where despite policy documents which identify the issues for women in prison, changes to the conditions they are held in have been slow to materialise. The UK Government has since highlighted the specific needs of female prisoners (Ministry of Justice, 2018a) but this has not necessarily led to corresponding changes within the prison system. This is perhaps not helped by frequent changes to the government ministers in charge of justice and prisons, leading to the lack of a consistent approach.

Of particular importance in relation to mothers within the Bangkok Rules, are rules which state that women should, where possible, be held close to home (Rule 4) and that custodial sentences should be avoided, where possible, for women who have children, unless the offence was particularly serious or violent (Rule 64). The Bangkok Rules acknowledge the gender-specific needs of women prisoners, of both a physical and emotional nature, that will require particular adjustments such as trauma-informed care. In 2013 the Women's Custodial Estate Review, proposed the creation of 'strategic hubs' that would involve "making flexible use of custodial capacity to keep women as close to home as possible for as much of their sentence as possible" (National Offender Management Service, 2013, p. 4). Again, it acknowledged the proposals in the Corston report regarding holding women closer to home in smaller custodial establishments.

Transforming Rehabilitation (Ministry of Justice, 2013) and its accompanying Offender Rehabilitation Act (UK Parliament, 2014) made substantial changes to the supervision of offenders in the community and the probation service. One important alteration was

the introduction of compulsory supervision in the community for people who have been in custody for a period of 12 months after they have been released. This had a significant impact on women, as it led to far more women being recalled to custody during their supervision period than had occurred prior to this (Gelsthorpe and Russell, 2018; Dominey and Gelsthorpe, 2020). Many of these were women who had initially been in custody for very short sentences. In relation to the Bangkok Rules, this suggests perhaps a failure to account for the gender specific needs of women. In addition, as the Prison Reform Trust (Prison Reform Trust, 2018c) states, it indicates a 'net widening' or an increase in the reach of criminal justice policies that is resulting in more people being caught up in its systems, increasing the negative consequences for women and families.

Better Outcomes for Women Offenders (National Offender Management Service, 2015) outlines guidance on the principal ways of working effectively with women and identifies seven priority needs including mental health, substance misuse and family contact. It states that most women offenders are serving sentences in the community, comprising about 16% of those under community supervision, with nearly half having convictions for shoplifting, followed by actual bodily harm (ABH) and drugs offences. This document suggests that women in prison can be harder to manage due to increased rates of self-harm and 'prison misconducts', and reports that half of women in prison may have mental health needs. Ways of dealing with these needs outlined in this document include 'emotional support' in order to reduce stress, 'targeting impulsivity' and 'emotion regulation'. The document fails to acknowledge the wider issues in women's lives, leading to a feeling that it is the women themselves who are solely at fault and the ones that need to change. There is an emphasis on self-efficacy – or one's own belief in an ability to effect change, and on attitude – implying women need to achieve 'personal change'. There is little room for investigation of why women may be exhibiting poor mental health, such as prior trauma in their lives. There is also no mention of women having experienced the care system, child abuse or poverty and little mention of the root causes of women's trauma.

The Female Offender Strategy was published by the Government in 2018, outlining how it intended to work with 'female offenders' and identifying key issues (Ministry of Justice, 2018a). The Female Offender Strategy acknowledges that "criminalising vulnerable individuals has broader negative social impacts" (p.6). It references 'chaotic lifestyles' and 'vulnerability' and advocates less use of imprisonment, particularly short sentences and more use of community options. These intentions have been voiced numerous times in various policy and strategy documents but there appears to be a

disconnect between policy and practice in many areas of the country. For instance, in 2021 the government announced it would be building 500 additional prison spaces for women (UK Government, 2021), to much dismay from organisations working with women (Women in Prison, 2021) .

The Corston report (Corston, 2007) highlighted the characteristics of women in the prison system in England and Wales. It identified issues such as drug and alcohol use, high levels of mental health need and self-harm, histories of trauma and abuse, poverty and a lack of control over their lives. Although we must remember that not all women in prison experience these issues, many will unfortunately be additionally affected by the experience of becoming involved in the criminal justice system. This evidence was used to call for a different approach to women who have offended in order to better meet their needs. Recent evidence suggests that these vulnerabilities are still highly represented within the female prison population (Ministry of Justice, 2018a; Farmer, 2019); and that despite calls for custody to be reserved for only those who are a danger to the public, many women are still being convicted for non-violent offences and removed from their families. There have been repeated promises in policy and strategy documents that women should be held in smaller, community-based custodial centres, but again these have been slow to materialise (Corston, 2007; Ministry of Justice, 2018a). In the meantime, many more lives are being irreparably damaged, resulting in this trauma being passed on through the generations.

Current policy documents too often continue to centre trauma within individual women themselves in terms of diagnosing PTSD or personality disorders and advocate therapeutic or pharmaceutical fixes (National Offender Management Service, 2015). In addition, in many cases children, and the effect on their lives of a mother being taken into custody, are not taken into account (Minson, 2019b). There is therefore a distinct need to focus on wider familial and community traumas that are present in society. The wider impact of trauma in terms of poverty, disadvantage and violence against women and children are too often unaccounted for in these descriptions. The next section will define our understanding of trauma and how it can be applied to the experiences of mothers involved in the criminal justice system.

2.3 Perspectives on trauma

Increasingly, the role of trauma in women's mental wellbeing and subsequent offending behaviour has become well recognised (Greene, Haney and Hurtado, 2000; Segrave and Carlton, 2010). Its use as a term to describe the experience of harm has now become familiar in many health, social care and also criminal justice settings. It is often

applied alongside the concept of 'trauma-informed' workplaces and services which aim to provide a safe and non-triggering environment that aids wellbeing for all (Kubiak, Covington and Hillier, 2017) .

However, trauma is frequently viewed from a medical model in terms of psychiatric diagnoses such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) thus ignoring the wider societal and familial causes of trauma. There is a danger that such diagnoses place the emphasis back onto the individual in terms of their own faulty brain functioning and failure to cope effectively with life experiences. This leads to interventions also becoming medicalised in terms of prescribing drugs, rather than looking at what led to these events and how these events may be avoided in future. It is therefore pertinent to take a wider view of how trauma is defined and look beyond individuals to the social structures and systems that reproduce and enable harms to be inflicted (Comack, 2018). This section will investigate the definition of trauma from a multi-disciplinary perspective to understand how the term relates to women involved in the criminal justice system, by looking at the social and political contexts of women's lives and how this can make them more at risk of experiencing trauma. This will include the consideration of collective and structural trauma, in addition to more individual concepts of trauma such as those which may generally be envisaged.

2.3.1 The evolution of trauma

The modern roots of the term trauma can be traced back to Jean-Martin Charcot, a French neurologist working in Salpetriere in the late nineteenth century (White, 1997). He worked with predominantly female subjects who were diagnosed with 'hysteria', presenting with symptoms such as paralysis, convulsions and sensory loss. He was the first to suggest that physical symptoms could have psychological roots, and used live lectures where women underwent hypnosis to illustrate this phenomenon. Although Charcot's work at the Salpetriere was ground-breaking and stopped the use of widespread hysterectomy to deal with hysteria, Charcot did not fully investigate the causes of the traumas his patients described (Herman-Lewis, 1992b). Janet, a student of Charcot, went on to further investigate the root causes of hysteria.

Freud also carried out work with predominantly young female patients and found that putting trauma into words could reduce 'hysterical' symptoms leading to the use of psychoanalysis as a form of treatment. Freud identified hysteria in female patients and went on to realise that much of it was the result of trauma in these women's lives. His patients told him of common experiences of sexual abuse, assault and incest (Breuer and Freud, 2009). He was then forced to conclude that abuse within the family was

widespread and realised that the sociocultural implications of this were vast. Freud to some extent then shied away from further work on the role of abuse in trauma believing this would not gain credence at that time, preferring instead to frame it in terms of 'conflict theory'. In the 1880s Janet, a student of Charcot's, alongside Freud and Breuer came to separate understandings that hysteria was predominantly caused by psychological trauma (Ringel and Brandell, 2012). It is therefore evident that the origins of 'trauma' come from studies of women who had experienced childhood abuse and sexual and domestic violence.

During the First World War, trauma was recognised in war veterans returning from duty. However, it was not until 1980 that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) became a feature of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) which listed certain events that could cause 'PTSD' alongside symptoms (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). At this stage it was thought that such events had to be 'unusual' and 'life-threatening' so experiences such as interpersonal and domestic violence were not included. It was not until the 1970s and increasing involvement from the women's movement that awareness of rape, domestic abuse and their connection with subsequent trauma was recognised (Herman-Lewis, 1992b). Campaigning eventually led to changes to the DSM following acknowledgement of the role of domestic and sexual abuse as a widespread and everyday occurrence that could result in PTSD. Herman-Lewis (1992b) was a key figure in this and applied a trauma framework to women's experiences of intimate partner violence and child abuse, introducing the concept of 'complex trauma'. Despite the origins of trauma and Charcot and Freud's early work with women, it has subsequently taken up until the last 10-20 years to recognise the role of trauma in relation to women's mental health. More recently it has been acknowledged that women and girls involved in the criminal justice system have often experienced trauma themselves and the impact of this is now being uncovered.

2.3.2 What is trauma?

Trauma can be defined as "a deeply distressing or disturbing experience" and is also a medical term for a severe injury, its origins come from the Greek literally meaning "wound" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2018). This definition implies, perhaps, that traumatic events or 'trauma' is something that *happens to* an individual. The problem with adopting this approach, however, is that there is a danger that people who have experienced trauma are seen as helpless victims, or that traumatic events are seen as being some fault within the person themselves. In light of this, McGarry and Walklate

(2015) question whether 'trauma' is the event itself, or alternatively the reaction to it. This raises additional issues around agency and individuals' reactions or ability to cope with traumatic events. One question that therefore arises is: are traumatised individuals those that find an event difficult to cope with, or is anyone who experienced a certain event traumatised in some way?

There are gender differences in both the likelihood of experiencing trauma and how we as individuals may react to it. Women are approximately twice as likely to experience PTSD, with a lifetime prevalence of 10.4% compared to 5% for men (Kessler *et al.*, 1995) but are also more likely to be victims of certain types of traumatic event such as interpersonal and sexual violence (Cortina and Kubiak, 2006). Historically - and arguably continuing into the present day - there have been moral judgements attached to experiences of trauma. Some events are widely agreed to be traumatising, such as war or natural disasters, whilst others may not be and it is often left to medical experts to decide or diagnose whether trauma exists or not. It is therefore possible that societies place moral assumptions about who can or cannot be considered 'traumatised' or suffering from the results of trauma.

There have long been criticisms of the DSM approach to defining trauma as incomplete and unrepresentative of all experiences, in particular from feminist writers (Burstow, 2003; Herman-Lewis, 1992b). In 1980, when PTSD first came into formal existence as a diagnosis only a small list of possible events were seen as traumatising enough to elicit it. Originally it was thought that only situations involving fear of the loss of life could result in clinical trauma, but more recently it has become apparent that this is not the only situation that can result in PTSD. It is now agreed that what are relatively day-to-day experiences for women, for instance intimate partner violence (IPV) which 26% of women experience across their lifespan (Office for National Statistics, 2017), can result in PTSD symptoms. However, it was only in 1994 that sexual violence was included in the definition of traumatic experiences (North *et al.*, 2016) and Herman-Lewis' description of 'complex' trauma (Herman-Lewis, 1992a) has still not been formally accepted by the DSM committee.

It is now widely acknowledged that living every day in an abusive relationship and struggling both physically and emotionally to survive in it can result in trauma. It is also agreed that victims of IPV can experience PTSD, which may be as a result of major traumatic events but can also be as a result of ongoing emotional abuse (Herman-Lewis, 1992a). Tseris (2013, p. 4) argues that the "trauma of long-term abuse is a qualitatively different experience". Others have also described how trauma arising from

interpersonal violence or abuse from someone who is a partner or caregiver can have effects which are qualitatively different and serve to cause the individual to lose trust and a sense of self and become overwhelmed by feelings of disempowerment and helplessness (Straussner and Calnan, 2014; Herman-Lewis, 1992b).

Herman-Lewis (1992b) introduces 'complex' PTSD as a way of describing the collection of symptoms experienced by victims of domestic and sexual abuse. However, some theorists have criticised this approach as another form of labelling and of pushing people into diagnostic categories (Burstow, 2003). Burstow (2003) suggests that instead of labelling someone as traumatised (or not) we should begin to see trauma as a 'complex continuum' on which we are all located. Burstow (2003) discusses how traumatised people may see the world more accurately, not less accurately than those who have experienced less trauma.

Increasingly, different types of trauma have been identified, including 'insidious trauma' arising from many small traumatic experiences that build upon one another, and 'vicarious trauma' experienced by people working with traumatised individuals (Blair and Ramones, 1996) in addition to the more well-known 'acute' trauma resulting from a single traumatic event. As outlined, 'complex trauma' has been identified as that which arises from repetitive prolonged trauma from a partner or caregiver (Herman-Lewis, 1992b). van der Kolk (2005) also identified 'developmental trauma', which refers to trauma as a result of early life experiences such as abuse, neglect, and witnessing or experiencing violence. Trauma may also arise from witnessing events rather than being directly involved in them; in addition, how others present react to events can also add to or constitute the trauma. Historical or transgenerational/intergenerational trauma, which has predominantly been studied by those working with families of holocaust survivors and indigenous groups, is seen as affecting a community over time and being passed on through the generations either directly or indirectly (Menzies, 2010; Braveheart-Jordan and DeBruyn, 1995).

2.3.3 The concept of intergenerational trauma

The term 'intergenerational trauma' has primarily been used by researchers looking at the experiences of indigenous communities, often in Australia and Canada (Braveheart-Jordan and DeBruyn, 1995; Menzies, 2008) and also the experiences of children of holocaust survivors (Danieli, 1985). It is also sometimes termed 'historical' or 'collective' trauma (Erikson, 1976) and the use of the term attempts to understand the origins of the trauma inflicted as situated within wider state and governmental policies affecting these groups, in addition to family and individual factors. Many

aboriginal and other indigenous communities suffered from stigma, racism and associated policies which often placed their children into the care of residential schools where further abuse was inflicted on them. They subsequently became disconnected from their culture, family and society and experienced numerous harms. Intergenerational trauma has been used as a way of describing these collective harms.

Additionally, the terms 'collective' and 'transgenerational' trauma have been used by researchers looking at comparable ideas around the transmission of trauma across generations (Alexander, 2012). The basic premise being that with intergenerational trauma, trauma is not a one-off reaction to an event that occurs to an individual, but an ongoing, collective experience. This could be influenced by societal factors and may be experienced by a community or a group or race of people. Menzies (2008) describes how aboriginal people have experienced traumas inflicted by government policies, stigma, racism and poverty, that have continued to impact on future generations in terms of drug and alcohol abuse and domestic and sexual violence. Research on holocaust survivors and their families found ongoing legacies of emotional distress passed down the generations (Danieli, 1981). Danieli (2013) also includes 'cycle of abuse' theories of childhood abuse and domestic abuse within the spectrum of transgenerational trauma.

Other research has focused on intergenerational trauma as 'relational trauma': trauma that is passed on through the generations via parents and how they relate to their children (Isobel *et al.*, 2019). The emphasis is, therefore, on attachment and parenting. Albeck, 1992, cited in Isobel *et al.* (2019), however, has argued that how the trauma is transmitted is less important than the aspects of the trauma itself. Some researchers also argue that intergenerational trauma is that which has not been directly experienced by the second generation but passed on vicariously (Kellermann, 2001). As can be seen, there are a number of different interpretations of this term, with some writers also using 'historical trauma' or 'collective trauma' to discuss related concepts.

In this research study the interpretation of intergenerational trauma used will primarily be based on Menzies' ideas (Menzies, 2008), but reinterpreted to apply to the focus of the research: mothers in the criminal justice system. As such the definition of intergenerational trauma will refer to traumatic events experienced by an individual which then affect the lives of children and other family members such as grandparents. The definition of trauma will include not only specific individual experiences such as child abuse, neglect and IPV but also wider societal traumas such as poverty, disadvantage and gender. The key traumatic episode at the centre of this will be that of

state enforced separation of mother and child by the prison system, seeing this as the main trauma inflicted and analysing the impact of this.

The concept of inter-generational trauma has not, as yet, been transferred into a way of conceptualising the harms inflicted on mothers and their children when convicted to a period of custody. Female prisoners in particular, as acknowledged in the Corston report, are likely to have a history of abuse and vulnerability which is then exacerbated by the experience of enforced separation from family. These cycles of abuse and separation then lead to poor outcomes for the next generation. Although women in prison should not be viewed as a homogenous group, when data concerning women in custody is considered, it is evident that women in the prison system will have often experienced problems at school, have a higher chance of having been brought up in care, and consequently have reduced life chances from the outset (Corston, 2007). There are also additional issues specific to women who are foreign nationals and from minority ethnic groups (Prison Reform Trust, 2017). In this way we can identify how the notion of intergenerational trauma can be used as a way of describing and encapsulating the harms inflicted on female prisoners and their families.

Researchers such as Wacquant, have identified the impact of governmental policies and in particular how welfare policies cross over with criminal justice policies (Wacquant, 2009), leading to the criminalisation of those living in poverty. Wacquant also identifies how women are more likely to be left in poverty and reliant on state welfare. It can then be seen how these policies fit into the wider concept of inter-generational trauma as social and structural traumas faced by mothers in the criminal justice system. Considering the role of government or state policies concerning mothers in custody, we can see that the approaches are often punitive and stigmatising rather than supportive. This illustrates the need to also consider the wider structural and historical basis of trauma, and of trauma which can arise by virtue of belonging to a particular social group or community. Researchers in this area have described oppressed communities, people losing connection, pervasive despair, and an increased use of drugs to numb the pain (DeHart, 2008).

2.4 Trauma and criminalised women

The concept of intergenerational trauma as outlined above, can be linked to different approaches to working with offenders and within criminology more generally. For example, 'pathways theory' (McDaniels-Wilson and Belknap, 2008; DeHart *et al.*, 2014; Salisbury and Van Voorhis, 2009) looks at the relationship between previous abuse, mental health needs and substance misuse, and how this may result in offending

trajectories for women. Another approach is adopted by Foster (2012), who utilises 'general strain theory' to examine importation and deprivation strains on imprisoned mothers and the intergenerational consequences for their children. Turney (2014) additionally uses 'stress proliferation theory' to look at how parental imprisonment affects children's health outcomes. Others have identified similar issues through the idea of adverse childhood experiences or ACEs (Felitti *et al.*, 1998). All these approaches refer to what can be described as prior trauma, and its prevalence in the lives of women involved in the criminal justice system.

2.4.1 Prior trauma

Research has found that the majority of female prisoners may have experienced prior trauma in their lives. Green *et al.* (2005) found that 98% of women in their sample had experienced trauma exposure, chiefly in the form of domestic violence and abuse (71%). Cook *et al.* (2005) observed that 99% of imprisoned women in their sample had experienced at least one traumatic event in their lives. Greene, Haney and Hurtado (2000) examined what they term 'criminogenic risk factors' in the lives of incarcerated women, finding that 86% had experienced sexual or physical abuse as a child or witnessed violence in the home, 55% had been sexually abused, and 58% had experienced intimate partner violence.

Some researchers have looked at the role of trauma in people's lives through the lens of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (Felitti *et al.*, 1998; Mulcahy, 2018). These can be identified as roughly similar or comparable to incidents of trauma - namely physical and emotional abuse, mental illness, domestic violence and substance abuse - although the focus is on traumatic events occurring *within childhood* rather than through the life course. In terms of conceptualising intergenerational trauma it can be seen how the effects of ACEs on future life outcomes are important. ACEs, however, tend to understand traumas as those directly inflicted upon an individual, often within the family. There are also parallels with work on links between victimisation and offending; often women have been exposed to traumatic events as victims of childhood or sexual abuse, which has then led to withdrawal from school and home life and a journey into offending behaviour (DeHart, 2008).

DeHart (2008) describes how women can become marginalised from support systems due to victimisation. They may also develop a 'generalized distrust' of others and gradually withdraw from social systems such as school, home and work. Additionally, feelings of low self-worth and low self-esteem may become apparent. The more this withdrawal occurs, and isolation increases, the greater the likelihood of not being able

to re-establish oneself in society. In this way legitimate avenues for financial and emotional support can become cut off. DeHart (2008) goes on to detail how the cumulative impact of victimisation over the lifespan can lead to offending.

Segrave and Carlton (2010) focus on the impact of domestic abuse on women, also detailing the effects on children and grandchildren, and go on to describe an intergenerational cycle of violence. They also describe situations where "abuse, death, criminalisation and imprisonment are constants from an early age" (Segrave and Carlton, 2010, p. 292), rather than isolated events. In this way a situation develops where there is no escape or respite from traumatic events as there may be for someone who has more means of support. Women are described as "struggling to survive prior to imprisonment" (p.293) and trauma is described as a "defining feature" of women's imprisonment. Segrave and Carlton (2010, p. 288) additionally define trauma as a "recurring and normalised constant" within women's lives, as does DeHart (2008). They also describe how marginalisation and exclusion go hand in hand with trauma in underlying female prisoners' lives, pointing also to structural influences involved in women's pathways to offending. Further research is needed to understand how far the traumas inflicted on women are due to societal and structural influences. There is also the question of to what extent current government policies, institutions and systems add to this.

Pathways theory (Belknap, Lynch and DeHart, 2016; Salisbury and Van Voorhis, 2009) posits that prior trauma history and victimisation, such as childhood and sexual abuse, are linked to later offending behaviour. This explains why women prisoners are more likely to exhibit poor mental health and to abuse substances than males. Prison staff interviewed by Belknap, Lynch and DeHart (2016) talked about multiple generations of families involved with the criminal justice system. McDaniels-Wilson and Belknap (2008) found that 55% of female prisoners interviewed had been raped; this increased to 70% when the definition of rape used was broadened. There was often more than one abuser and more than one type of abuse being enacted. Linking this back to Herman-Lewis (1992b), we can see how the complex trauma she describes is a feature of the lives of many women who find themselves involved in criminal justice systems across the world.

Although there is a wealth of research concerning the mental health needs of women in the prison system, less is known about the relationships between specific conditions - such as postnatal depression, postpartum psychosis and bereavement - and how these may be linked to offending behaviour, either directly or indirectly. There is some

research (Poobalan *et al.*, 2007; Pawlby *et al.*, 2007) concerning the effects of postnatal depression on the children of affected mothers. There is also some research regarding mothers who kill their children as a result of post-natal depression (Kauppi *et al.*, 2008) but less study of any direct link between post-natal depression and offences committed by mothers more generally.

One element of prior trauma where there is a paucity of research in relation to women involved in the criminal justice system is that of child removal by social services. For some women involved in the criminal justice system, there has already been involvement of social services in their lives with, in some cases, the removal of a child or children either to another family member or to social services. This can be a trigger to a deterioration in mental health, substance abuse and consequent offending. Some women in this situation may feel that there is nothing left worth fighting for (Allen, Flaherty and Ely, 2010; Povey, 2017). In some cases removal may be related to intimate partner violence being experienced by the mother, which remains a difficult and at times contentious issue for state agencies to deal with (Broadhurst and Mason, 2020). Stone, Liddell and Martinovic (2017) investigated the barriers for women in custody regaining custody of their children, including personal health and wellbeing factors and systemic factors, such as social services practices. Garcia-Hallett (2019) looked at whether motherhood could serve as a turning point in reducing offending behaviour, finding that it interacted with other factors such as poverty and substance misuse.

2.4.2 The trauma of intimate partner violence

The traumatic impact of domestic abuse has a multitude of effects on women and mothers within the prison system. In some cases, the abusive partner may have been involved in any offending through direct or indirect coercion of the woman to offend. Another by-product of abusive relationships may be poverty as a result of financial abuse or isolation, and women may begin offending in order to provide for their family financially (Roberts, 2019). Thirdly, in some cases women have themselves offended against an abusive partner as a result of being on the receiving end of long-term abuse (Moe, 2004).

IPV can also be seen within the wider context of violence against women and girls and gender-based violence, as cutting across individual level, family level and societal levels of trauma. Violence against women is endemic across all levels of society with women in prison reporting gendered violence within the family home as a child, within society in the form of rape and sexual assault, and within the family through domestic

violence and abuse. They are also subjected to gendered ideas around how they should behave as women and mothers.

Women may also have been coerced into committing crimes by their abusers either directly (Jones, 2008) or indirectly, as a result of poverty, substance abuse, mental health needs and attempts to cope with abuse (Moe, 2004; Roberts, 2019). Roberts (2019) describes the broader effects of IPV on offending, showing how offending can occur many years later, and can be related to trying to survive after the abusive relationship. Jones (2008) found that one third of women in a study had been in a violent relationship with their co-defendant. Moe (2004) describes crimes connected to abuse and dealing with its effects; for example, drugs offences and property offences.

2.4.3 Structural trauma: poverty and disadvantage

Research on domestic abuse survivors describes structural trauma as trauma that "is a problem of an overall system, rather than being caused by isolated individual factors" (Paper Dolls Research Group, 2019, p. 18). What is key is how society responds to trauma survivors. With regard to IPV, it is often a negative or unsupportive reaction. Delving into the wider institutional and structural traumas impacting on women and mothers in the prison system, Wacquant (Wacquant, 2001; Wacquant, 2009) points to the influence of neo liberalisation and the criminalisation of poverty. This can be related to collective and intergenerational trauma; he describes how whole communities can become involved in the reach of criminal justice policies.

Allen, Flaherty and Ely (2010) describe women already marginalised in terms of race, class, gender and victimisation, who subsequently face further systemic barriers. Wacquant (2001) argues that the current widening of the reach of criminal justice policies is generally having the greatest impact on those from impoverished groups and marginalised groups, thus penalising poverty. Unless we increase social, health and educational support, as opposed to strengthening the penal system, we are in danger of increasing disadvantage and impoverishment. Povey (2017) specifically applies this to women by arguing that marginalised lone female parent households are often those penalised by the expansion of criminal justice policies. Another group highlighted by Povey are vulnerable young women who are often treated in a punitive manner. There is a need to focus on dealing with underlying socio-economic problems rather than 'individualised behaviour change'. Other feminist researchers also talk about the 'feminisation of poverty', relating it to women's focus on acquisitive offending which is often related to providing for the family and can be in response to abusive relationships (Davies, 2002). Davies (2002) suggests that financial crimes – such as fraud, forgery

and theft - are often committed in order to provide for the family and are often linked to their poor financial predicament. Monti and Deckard (2021) argue that in many cases, neoliberal systems which punish marginalised women then further punish them, by criminalising them. This then becomes cyclical and intergenerational.

Heberle, Obus and Gray (2020, p. 814) describe mass incarceration of mothers in the US as "state perpetrated violence", arguing that the trauma that is caused by removing a parent to prison creates intergenerational trauma in both the short and long term. In the US, women from ethnic minorities are hugely overrepresented in the numbers of women in prison, compared to the general population, so this is also an issue compounded by racial discrimination and disadvantage. From a legal standpoint, Minson (2019b), highlights the different way families are treated in the family courts versus the criminal courts. In the criminal courts, little regard is given to children and the state can remove a parent without full consideration of a child's practical and financial needs. Issues of stigma also arise here, with judgements being made on whether someone is a good or bad mother. This relates to the idea of 'double deviance' discussed in **Section 2.2.3**.

2.4.4 Pains of imprisonment

In addition to research around prior trauma or importation factors, there is also a body of work looking at the 'pains' of imprisonment or deprivation factors. Sykes (1958) described the pains of imprisonment as being related to deprivations, namely those of autonomy, liberty, goods and services, relationships and security. Work in this area examines the extent to which prison itself may produce further harm and trauma. This is particularly relevant when considering the intergenerational effects of trauma, as it relates to the impact of separation of mothers and children on entering prison, and also the subsequent effect on women's ability to parent on leaving prison. Another trauma thus enacted on women is the trauma of imprisonment itself, and for mothers, the resulting separation from their children that this causes (Celinska and Siegel, 2010). In this way trauma is passed on intergenerationally, as often children are removed from the family home, resulting in them being placed in unstable care arrangements. Female incarceration therefore impacts on the next generation much more significantly than male incarceration generally does. When men go to prison, in the majority of cases a female partner remains in the family home looking after the home and family. The impact on the family of maternal imprisonment will be examined in detail in **Chapter 3**.

Crewe, Hulley and Wright (2017, p. 1360) found that women serving long term sentences suffered the "pains and problems" of imprisonment much more significantly

than men. In particular, losing contact with friends and family was a more pronounced issue for women. Researchers have also investigated the impact of the loss of the 'mothering role' and separation from children in detail (Baldwin, 2017). Others have described how women may be retraumatised by services: not being believed, or, being seen as addicts, prostitutes or bad mothers (Carlen, 1983). Their punishment is that their children are taken away and they are sent to prison.

Pogrebin and Dodge (2001) describe women's initial experiences in prison as those of fear, trauma and unpreparedness. Added to this for many women are the extreme emotions resulting from their separation from their children. For many women an additional factor is their embodiment of guilt and remorse about their offence, which may be turned inwards in many cases resulting in self-injurious behaviour (Chamberlen, 2016). Evidence shows that women are more likely to self-harm than men whilst in custody. In addition, although in the community rates of suicide by men are higher, this is not the case in the prison system (Ministry of Justice, 2021b). This again points to the need for a gendered approach to women's imprisonment. Fedock (2017) outlines both importation and deprivation theories of emotional adjustment to prison, arguing that both micro (individual level) and macro (institution or system level) factors need to be taken into account. This is reflected in the ecological approach that this research undertakes (see **Chapter 4**).

Greer (2002) describes how women in prison attempt to cope with the experience that is enacted on them. Ways of coping include diversionary tactics, friendship and camaraderie, spiritual pursuits, humour and self-reflection. However, Fournier *et al.* (2011) found there is often a lack of services and interventions that address the trauma history of women in prison. Walker (2011) highlights the importance of healthy relationships for women post-custody, including with family and peers. She posits that this may allow psychological growth to occur and improve self-esteem. Other researchers, such as van Ginneken (2016) have described how custody can for some women, result in 'post-traumatic growth' including being a turning point in a woman's life. This study described how women found strength through the experience of custody, although it did not show whether these changes had long lasting consequences for the individuals involved.

There is a small body of research which details how, in some circumstances and for some women, prison can be a place of safety and in this way reduce potential harm rather than cause it. Bradley and Davino (2002) found that some women may be safer in prison: this was usually related to the severe interpersonal violence they are being

subjected to outside prison. It is arguable that prison should not be the resort that women have to take in order to be safe from abusive partners. Recently, inspection reports of the women's estate and governors themselves, have expressed concerns over prison being an inappropriate place to safely keep those with acute and enduring mental health needs (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, 2018, p. 19). Segrave and Carlton (2010) also describe a tension in their research about prison both causing and preventing harm. Again, this often relates to the presence of domestic abuse, drugs and poverty on the outside, meaning many women leave custody to an unsafe environment.

2.4.5 Trauma-informed approaches

In recent years, trauma-informed approaches and practice have increasingly been used within a variety of health, education, and criminal justice settings (Gerber, 2019; Perry and Daniels, 2016; Kubiak, Covington and Hillier, 2017). These approaches aim to recognise trauma and reduce its impact on individuals, in particular aiming to stop further trauma being triggered by a service or situation. Although on the surface, raising practitioners' awareness of trauma and its impacts appears to be beneficial, there have also been concerns raised as to whether certain environments can really be termed 'trauma-informed' because they are ultimately trauma causing (Jewkes *et al.*, 2019; Vaswani and Paul, 2019). This raises the possibility that these initiatives are merely covering up on a surface level the wider harms being caused by systems such as criminal justice and mental health services.

Within the women's custodial estate in England and Wales, the Healing Trauma programme has been delivered by specially trained prison officers (Petrillo, Thomas and Hanspal, 2019). The Scottish Prison Service has also delivered similar training courses within the women's estate as part of its drive for Trauma Informed Practice (TiP). An evaluation of this approach in the English women's estate (Petrillo, 2021) concluded that trauma informed practice can have significant benefits for individual women in terms of health and wellbeing. However, it also acknowledged the constraints of this within the prison context. Vaswani and Paul (2019), also raise the issue of how systems designed for punishment cannot offer a truly 'trauma-informed' approach due to the contradictions inherent in their nature and the tension between care and control that this presents.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has put into context some of the issues surrounding maternal imprisonment, including the development of policy and practice in this area. It has

outlined how women and, especially, mothers are a marginalised group within the prison system. This has led to them being held in conditions designed for men, where their specific needs are often not fully taken into account. As described, data is still scarce on the number of women who are mothers who are held in prison, but research shows that they experience added difficulties.

This chapter has outlined the historical development of trauma and it's use as a term across different disciplines. It has described how different definitions of trauma have developed, and how these have been applied to different experiences. There continue to be conflicting schools of thought and approaches to working with individuals who have experienced trauma. Research has shown that the majority of women entering the criminal justice system have experienced some kind of trauma in their lives, prior to entering prison.

Trauma can also be seen in a wider, social sense, encompassing the social experiences of individuals and groups in society. Marginalised groups within society can therefore experience multiple and cumulative traumas across the lifespan. Trauma can also be seen as impacting on subsequent generations. The imprisonment of mothers can, therefore, be interpreted as a key facilitator of inter-generational trauma.

Chapter 3: The impact of maternal Imprisonment on children and families

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore research to date concerning the harms inflicted on families by maternal imprisonment, arguing that these harms are wide reaching and long-lasting. This is conceptualised through the idea of 'intergenerational trauma' as a way of understanding the impact on children, mothers and grandparents. It will begin by identifying who the children and families of women in prison are and the context of their situations. It will then go on to describe recent policy developments in this area. This will be followed by an analysis of research to date that has investigated issues encountered by families of women in prison. This will begin by describing research in the area of pregnancy and infants in prison, how women mother from prison and how contact with families is maintained. Following this evidence concerning the impact on families of imprisonment will be presented.

3.2 Who are the children and families of prisoners?

Research concerning the experiences of families of those in prison has been steadily increasing in scope and frequency in recent years. Researchers have attempted to describe the harms caused to families of those in prison in different ways, for example secondary prisonisation (Comfort, 2008), punishment drift (Lippke, 2017), collateral consequences (Codd, 2008), and more recently, symbiotic harms (Condry and Minson, 2020). However we choose to conceptualize these harms, research has agreed that they are real, damaging and in many cases ongoing for families of prisoners. It is suggested that the harms inflicted on families by imprisonment are inflicted on innocent parties, therefore the state is punishing people who have committed no wrong other than being related to a family member who has been found guilty of a crime. This raises a moral issue concerning the right of the state to inflict this trauma on often already vulnerable families, compounding their difficulties and, in many cases, changing irrevocably their perceptions of the criminal justice system and the state.

For children in particular the removal of a parent, and especially a mother, by the state can have devastating consequences. They may have to move home, move school and become separated from siblings. Facilities for maintaining contact with parents in the prison system can be limited, and often little consideration is given to how the child or children will be looked after (Minson, 2019a). Children may feel that ultimately, they have been sentenced as well as their mother. Although there is some provision for young babies up to 18 months old to stay in prison with their mother, this is not guaranteed and depends on the offence and the agreement of various authorities.

Minson (2019b), in particular, has argued that the state treats differently those children who are removed from their parents in the family court, versus those who are removed from their parents in the criminal court. She argues, from a child and human rights perspective, that these rights are being ignored when a parent, and particularly a mother, is sent to prison. The harms imposed are not just psychological and emotional, but link into wider issues such as poverty, housing and education. The stigmatisation that is added to this, dependent on the crime and its circumstances, can be worse for those in the community who bear the brunt of it.

It is estimated that between 127,000 (Murray, 2007) and 312,000 (Crest Advisory, 2019; Ministry of Justice, 2012) children may experience parental imprisonment each year. Murray (2007) states that 1.1% of children in the UK under 18 had a parent imprisoned, which is comparable to the number of children experiencing parental divorce. He argues that large amounts of resources are invested in studying the effects of divorce on children, but this is not reflected for those experiencing parental imprisonment. A report by the national charity, Barnardos (2014), compares the rights and resources provided to those going into care versus those whose parent is imprisoned. This again raises the idea that children of imprisoned parents are marginalised and unrecognised. It therefore seems there is often a limited amount of credence given to the impact on children of parental imprisonment and that they are indeed the 'hidden victims' of custodial sentences.

Women in prison in England and Wales currently comprise approximately 5% of the total prison population (Ministry of Justice, 2018b) which equates to around 3200 women in prison at any given time. For a number of years, the female prison population has been relatively stable, after a sharp increase which occurred in the early 2000's. Definitive data on how many of those women who are in prison are mothers is difficult to determine, as it is not something that is routinely recorded, and the prison population is constantly changing as many are imprisoned on remand or for short term sentences. The only national research studying female prisoners' children, a Home Office report in 1997 (Caddle and Crisp, 1997), found that 61% of women in prison were pregnant or were mothers to dependent children. Between them, these 1035 mothers had 2168 children in total. Plugge, Douglas and Fitzpatrick (2006) found that 70% of women in prison in their study had children. Other research has suggested that the number of affected children this represents is somewhere in the region of 17-18,000 per year (Corston, 2007; Wilks-Wiffen, 2011). There may be many more women in prison, however, who are mothers but are not looking after their children currently, such as mothers of children who are now over 18, and grandmothers. There has also been a

suggestion that some women in prison may not readily disclose the fact that they have children on the outside due to fear of negative repercussions from state agencies (Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2019).

Unlike when a father goes to prison, when the majority of children will stay in the family home and continue to be cared for by their mother, only 5% of children stay in the family home when their mother is imprisoned (Corston, 2007). As the recent parliamentary review states (Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2019), there is a dearth of current data on who cares for children in this situation. The Corston report (Corston, 2007) details that children will often end up being cared for by grandmothers (25%), or, by other family members or friends (usually female) (29%), with 9% being cared for by their father and 12% ending up in state care. These facts alone exhibit the disruption caused by maternal imprisonment. Due to this, imprisonment also has a significant effect on many familial relationships in the wider family. There is little or no provision in the UK for financial or emotional support for the carers of children whose parent is in prison and, as entering custody often happens at short notice or unexpectedly, carers must step in at short notice themselves.

3.2.1 Policy developments regarding the families of women in prison

In recent years, the significance of maintaining family ties for those in prison has been higher on the agenda, primarily as a route to reducing reoffending. Lord Farmer was commissioned by the Government to carry out a review into how strengthening family ties could benefit those in custody (Farmer, 2017). The report describes family ties as the 'golden thread' that should be running throughout work in prisons. The initial review predominantly looked at male prisoners, and at how maintaining family ties could reduce reoffending and the intergenerational transmission of crime. This included exploring family contact, parenting skills and other family work done by prisons. The report proposes that "maintaining and developing family relationships" (p.10) should be stated as part of the purpose of prison in order that it is kept high on the agenda. Effective family work is described within the report as being vitally important in reforming and rehabilitating offenders.

Following this, a second review was commissioned in 2019, focusing specifically on women in custody (Farmer, 2019). The second review acknowledges that many women in custody have had very negative family experiences, particularly with regard to abuse and intimate partner violence. It recognises that for women, family is not always a safe and positive influence, whereas for men the opposite is often true, with wives, female partners and mothers comprising the majority of visitors to men in

custody. Ultimately, for women who offend, the best way to maintain family ties would be to stop giving mothers with dependent children custodial sentences, unless absolutely necessary. The main recommendations of the report place an emphasis on diversion and better consideration of the needs of women, and particularly mothers.

The main point to be acknowledged here is that for women, family ties to male partners may not necessarily be a factor that reduces reoffending. In some cases, for women who maintain their ties to male partners, their offending is likely to increase. For men, the opposite is likely: men's ties to mothers and female partners may have a positive impact. In terms of children, some research illustrates how maintaining the mothering role or reconnecting with children can be a positive driver for change in terms of women's offending behaviour (Barnes and Stringer, 2014; Mignon and Ransford, 2012). Whereas the removal of children can lead to a sense of despair and act as a trigger for further offending, women anticipating having custody of their children upon release have something positive to strive for.

The Joint Committee on Human Rights in 2019 reported on the right to family life for children whose mothers are in prison (Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2019). This in-depth look at the consequences for children when their mothers are sent to prison concludes that it is essential that data is collected on how many mothers with children are in prison, as stated in the Bangkok Rules (UN General Assembly, 2010). The report agrees with the Farmer report (Farmer, 2019) that the use of pre-sentence reports must be improved in order that when sentencing, judges have appropriate information available on how children will be impacted. Finally, it notes how, "separating a baby from its mother is a serious interference with the right to family life" (Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2019, p. 33) and advises that mothers and babies should have immediate access to mother and baby units (MBUs) as needed. Again, these recommendations are to be welcomed, as there remain geographical differences in the facilities available to women in different areas.

3.3 Infants and pregnancy in prison

Historically there has been some debate about infants and children being present in prison with their mothers. At one time it was commonplace for babies and children to go to prison with their mothers, until Elizabeth Fry assisted in the removal of many children from the damaging effects of prisons (Codd, 2008). More recently arguments based on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1998) have argued that removing infants from their mothers causes long term problems with attachment (Powell, Ciclitira and Marzano, 2017). This has informed the current situation in England and Wales, where

babies may remain with their mothers in prison up to the age of 18 months. After this age it is considered more beneficial for them to live in the community, where they will have greater access to varied activities and socialisation. However, in other countries, such as Greece and India, it is still general practice for children to be in prison with their mother. Countries such as Denmark and the Netherlands utilise halfway houses and some countries allow children up to the age of 5 or 6 (Philbrick, Ayre and Lynn, 2014).

Data is not routinely collected regarding the number of pregnant women in prison in England and Wales although it is estimated that each year there are generally around 600 pregnant women representing 6% of the female prison population held in custody (Abbott, 2018a). Data released after the death of a baby in HMP Bronzefield stated that 47 pregnant women were held in custody on the day of data collection (the Guardian, 2019). Of the 12 women's prisons in England and Wales, only six of these currently have mother and baby units (MBUs). This means that women may have to travel a long way from their home to access one and often this will mean making a decision between moving further away from a child on the outside, versus the possibility of staying with a baby in prison (O'Keeffe and Dixon, 2015). Mother and baby units are a vital resource in keeping mother and baby together but there are not enough places, and it is not a long term placement. In most cases, babies can only stay in an MBU until they reach 18 months of age, although this is left to the discretion of the individual unit, for instance, if a mother is nearing the end of a sentence her baby may be able to stay with her in the MBU beyond 18 months (National Offender Management Service, 2014).

There are varying rates of applications to mother and baby units - women can only apply to an MBU once they are actually in prison. As the application process itself can take a reasonable amount of time, this makes things difficult for mothers who are serving short sentences, although this should be taken into account. Only about 50% of mothers are successful in getting a place (Ministry of Justice, 2016), dependent on the agreement of prison staff and a social worker that it is a suitable placement. Dolan *et al.* (2019) found that those who may benefit most from MBU placement were the least likely to be admitted, while women who had previously been employed and were more 'stable' were those most likely to get a place. Women residing on MBUs are currently expected to return to full work just 6 weeks after the birth, or else they will not get their usual pay. This is obviously not comparable with life in the community, and is currently being challenged by voluntary organisations (Birth Companions, 2016).

Women currently residing in a prison without an MBU may receive differing levels of information about MBUs and how to apply. They may be fearful of travelling to a new prison even further from home, with even less possibility of visits occurring. Many women have said that they would want to visit the MBU and understand the benefits of it before they could decide whether to apply to go there (O'Keeffe and Dixon, 2015). For those women who do not wish to apply to an MBU, or who are refused a place, the baby will usually be removed shortly after birth and either placed with suitable family members in the community or placed in the care of social services. This is a critical time for women, highlighted by the death in 2015 of a woman at Low Newton Prison, five days after returning to prison after the removal of her baby (the Guardian, 2016).

The charity Birth Companions (Birth Companions, 2021) have been working with pregnant women in and after prison in England since 1996. They provide both ante- and post-natal support to women, and birth companions to women in the London area. Their 'Birth Charter for Women in Prison in England and Wales' (Birth Companions, 2016) details their recommendations on how pregnant women should be cared for based on their experiences of supporting pregnant women in prison. They argue that a 'prison service order' or PSO should be created specifically for women in the perinatal period in the prison estate in order to ensure consistent appropriate care for these women in order that "cycles of disadvantage are not repeated" p.26.

There has been a limited amount of research carried out regarding the experiences of pregnant women in prison. Abbott (2018a) describes how pregnant women feel shamed and humiliated by being brought to hospital in handcuffs or chains, which should not be routine practice. She has further shown that in some cases women are still not getting to hospital on time and are giving birth in their cells (Abbott, 2018b). Again evidence shows there are inconsistencies in procedures and care occurring across the prison estate. Powell, Ciclitira and Marzano (2017) used an attachment theory perspective to examine literature on mother-infant separations due to imprisonment. They found that separations were always detrimental, and that an emphasis on attachment theory could be an approach warranting further study.

3.4 Mothering from the inside

It can be observed that there are family, community and structural barriers to mothers in the criminal justice system maintaining contact with their children. This can include the relationship with carers of children on the outside, prison systems and procedures, criminal justice and social services policies. Taking an ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), these can be related to micro, meso and exo-systems which

all intertwine and impact on the mother's ability to maintain the mothering role (see **Chapter 4**). This then has a compounding, intergenerational impact on the children and families who are affected by this.

Following from research into women's imprisonment in general, a smaller number of researchers have focused on maternal imprisonment specifically and the implications and effects of this (Baldwin, 2021; Booth, 2020b; Masson, 2019; Lockwood, 2020). For example, Baldwin (2017) interviewed mothers about their experiences of prison, particularly in relation to their emotions and carceral spaces. The painful experience of separation is described and particularly the added pain of not being able to help children on the outside when they are going through difficult times and emotions. She argues that mothering is disrupted but potentially also destroyed by maternal imprisonment. In a study by Allen, Flaherty and Ely (2010) women talked about the powerlessness they experienced with regard to separation from their children, child protection arrangements, and their ability to change the course of their own and their children's lives. Shame was also a key theme that arose, along with feelings of guilt and inadequacy as a mother.

Research has generally outlined how separation from their children is one of the hardest parts of imprisonment for mothers (Slotboom *et al.*, 2011; Baldwin and Epstein, 2017). Easterling, Feldmeyer and Presser (2019) use the concept of ambiguous loss to understand how mothers and children experience separation due to imprisonment. This theory contests that whilst family members may be physically absent, they are psychologically present to some extent, which leads to conflicted, confusing emotions, guilt and shame. As women cannot perform their usual mothering roles, they are left feeling stressed and uncertain about their relationships with their children. Arditti (2012b) describes the traumatic separation and disenfranchised grief which is experienced by families in this situation.

Crewe, Hulley and Wright (2017) outline the difficulties of being a mother whilst in prison, echoing Hairston (1991), who describes how the loss of the mothering role was in itself extremely traumatic for women. This replicates other research which has identified the recurring theme that women in prison experience a lot of distress due to worrying about those on the outside, whilst feeling helpless to assist them (Masson, 2019; Baldwin, 2021). Foster (2012) agrees that separation from children is one of the major 'pains' of women's imprisonment. This study found that reducing the strains of imprisonment improved outcomes for both mothers in prison and their children.

Barnes and Stringer (2014) studied the maternal identity of mothers in prison and their expectations for release. They found that mothers who had more contact with their families and the caregivers for their children had more salient maternal identities. Expecting to have care of children on release also increased the likelihood of having a strong maternal identity. This shows the importance of fostering mothers' parenting skills and roles and the impact it can have on reintegration after release. Shamai and Kochal (2008) describe how motherhood was the only thing to keep many women surviving in the prison environment, as it gave meaning and hope to their lives. In Gilham (2012)'s study of incarcerated mothers in the US mothers described the love they had for their children, but at times were not able to admit the consequences of their actions prior to prison, and the impact this may have had on their parenting.

Celinska and Siegel (2010) identify different techniques that women in prison used to cope including 'being a good mother', disassociating themselves from other prisoners and finding ways to actively continue the mothering role from prison. This confirmed the central role that motherhood had for these women. Slotboom *et al.* (2011) in a large study in the Netherlands found that the trauma of imprisonment and separation was as difficult to deal with, if not more so, than the multiple prior needs women came to prison with. This suggests more should be done to avoid inflicting custodial sentences on mothers and also to make the prison space a less stressful environment.

Dodge and Pogrebin (2001) place an emphasis on the stigma surrounding mothers' imprisonment, including the way they are viewed by society and often consequently themselves, as 'bad mothers'. This narrative of stigma and shame can be difficult to move on from, posing a problem for reintegration into society. Again, this highlights the extent to which maternal imprisonment continues to impact on women's lives after custody and beyond.

In general, enforced separation from children due to imprisonment is seen as extremely detrimental; however, there are arguments that in some cases it may protect people from abusive situations (Bradley and Davino, 2002; Segrave and Carlton, 2010) and help mothers to develop parenting skills and deal with other issues, such as substance misuse and mental health needs. As Segrave and Carlton (2010, p. 294) point out, "imprisonment can both prevent *and* reproduce trauma and harm". The counterargument here is that this type of support should be taking place in the community before the need arises to inflict a custodial sentence – this is perhaps a reflection of the reduction and underfunding of women's services in the community. Bucerius, Haggerty and Dunford (2021) describe how the women they interviewed in

Canada found prison a refuge from the difficulties of life in the community. Prison was described as a break from living on the streets, not eating and being at risk of violence. As the research outlined above shows, parenting skills may also decrease as a result of separation due to a prison sentence. There is still much variability between the support and parenting programmes available to women across the prison estate.

As outlined above, research has shown that there are circumstances where prison can be seen as a place of safety for some women who are fleeing abuse in the community (Bradley and Davino, 2002). Prison should not be the only place where safety can be found in these circumstances; this gives clear evidence that more needs to be done to help women in the community before they end up in prison. Other research details how women may still be given prison sentences to 'protect' them when no other options are available, for example, Pattinson (2016) showed there has been an increase in women in the prison system with mental health needs that are not in an appropriate environment for their needs to be met. Both of these concerns highlight the continuing issues apparent within the criminal justice system.

3.4.1 The difficulties of maintaining contact

Data on how many women and mothers receive visits whilst in prison is difficult to come by as it is not currently something that is published. The Farmer report (Farmer, 2019, p. 76) recommended that a standardised visitors survey should be carried out in all women's prisons to ascertain this information. Many mothers in prison may not get visits from their children for a variety of reasons. At first glance it is easy to make assumptions as to the reasons behind this, but closer analysis reveals a number of complicated barriers to receiving visits, especially where children are involved. This includes the cost of travelling and the distance (Snyder, 2009) the timings of visits, issues with booking visits, the age of children, and the flexibility of their school (Booth, 2018). There are also mothers who are not allowed to see their children due to the nature of their offence, those who have not told their children where they are, and those who report finding it too painful to receive visits.

Mignon and Ransford (2012) found that, as might be expected letters and telephone calls were more frequently used to maintain contact than visits. Only 15% of women in their study had in-person visits; issues preventing visits included cost, distance and stigma, with some children not being aware their mother was in prison. Tasca (2016) shows how the carers of children are the 'gatekeepers of contact', and if this relationship breaks down, then visits do not occur. They report that female care givers were more likely to make visits than males. Baldwin (2017) describes how visits can be

a 'bittersweet experience' for mothers, due to the range of emotions they conjure up. She describes issues with regards to the rules and the carceral space: rules around physical contact can make visits difficult, particularly for younger children, including not being permitted to get out of a chair, or to take a child to the toilet.

Aiello and McCorkel (2018) discuss 'secondary prisonization' in terms of the effects on children. In relation to visiting, they describe how children have to learn to regulate their emotions and their bodies in order to cope within the confines of the prison regime. In terms of maintaining contact, this is ultimately reliant on the imprisoned person's relationship with those caring for children on the outside, in addition to other practical issues such as cost and distance. If a carer does not feel that visiting the imprisoned person will be beneficial for the child, if there is stigma and shame or if the relationship has broken down, then contact may not occur (Mignon and Ransford, 2012; Snyder, 2009).

Booth (2018) specifically looked at the importance of 'family visits', also termed 'family days' in some prisons. This study found that the quality of visits was of paramount importance to families, and this kind of visit was particularly valued as it provides more contact and a more enabling environment. Again, there were problems with being given short notice of these visits, and also mothers being transferred out to alternative prisons with little notice. In addition to extended family visits, some facilities are able to offer overnight stays or overnight visiting. Raikes and Lockwood (2019), evaluated Acorn House, an overnight visiting facility at Askham Grange, an English women's prison. While this kind of facility is more common in France and Scandinavia, this is the first facility of its kind in England and Wales. The evaluation identified that it provided much more extensive opportunities to strengthen family relationships and maintain ties, reducing the trauma of maternal imprisonment.

Burgess and Flynn (2013) provide a useful overview of the general types of interventions that are used within prisons to encourage contact and maintain relationships between mothers and children. These include children in prison programmes (equivalent to MBUs in England), contact maintenance (e.g., letters, telephone calls), family support programmes that offer one-to-one support, and parenting programmes which encourage prisoners to maintain and improve parenting. They indicate that these can all have different benefits. Booth (2020a) looked in more detail at the potential benefits of telephone contact between mothers and children. This study highlights inconsistencies regarding access to telephones across the prison estate, issues with delays in accounts being set up and funding the costs of calls,

making what could be a real positive way of maintaining contact a stressful and expensive process. More recently, and particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of video calls has become more widespread, but these also have their limitations (Minson and Flynn, 2021).

There are also difficulties inherent in providing secure spaces that house women and their children together. Haney (2013) studied a new type of prison in the United States that catered for women and children together. She describes how the women were under constant surveillance; their days were planned out for them giving them almost no control over their lives. This was coupled with rules around how to reprimand children and constant criticism of their 'mothering'. She describes how 'motherhood' was used as a punishment within this environment. In some US states the parental rights of prisoners are terminated after a certain period of time or for certain offences; therefore, this type of establishment can at least help mothers to maintain custody of their children.

3.5 Intergenerational trauma: effects on children and families

3.5.1 Describing the harms of maternal imprisonment

Researchers have described the harms inflicted on families by imprisonment in a number of different ways, each seeking to emphasise specific approaches. Essentially, the wider harms inflicted on families by being associated with both a relative in the prison system and the criminal justice system itself have wide-reaching impacts. They can be psychological, financial and physical in nature. They are generally experienced by already marginalised families and communities, thus reproducing disaffection and disadvantage. In the US, which has a higher rate of imprisonment than the UK, whole sections of communities can be caught up in the carceral system, often due to the expansion of minimum sentencing for drugs offences (McConnell, 2017).

Families can be affected by the net of the carceral system in many ways. This includes: their physical contact with it during arrests, attending court and prison visiting; the impact of caring for children; and the experience of continuing stigma surrounding a family member's involvement with criminal justice agencies. Collateral consequences is a term which some theorisers have used to understand the effects of prison on families; however, others have used this term as part of the offender's experience (Hagan and Dinovitzer, 1999; Turanovic, Rodriguez and Pratt, 2012). Some researchers have criticised the use of the word 'collateral' as suggesting that the harms experienced are less important or somehow secondary (Condry and Minson, 2020). Comfort (2008) first used the term 'secondary prisonisation' to describe the

experiences of families of people in prison. Others have termed it 'secondary punishment' (Condry and Smith, 2018). Again, there is an argument that this fails to encapsulate the entirety of families' experiences and places them somehow secondary to the offender's experience.

Lippke (2017) uses the term punishment drift, arguing that steps need to be taken to limit this damage to families, rather than just identifying and accepting it. When children lose their mother to the prison system, they can experience 'ambiguous loss' as a result of being unable to grieve for what they have lost and stuck in a hinterland between having and not having a mother (Boss, 2010). Condry and Minson (2020) argue that a new term, 'symbiotic harms' best describes the experiences of families. They suggest that this encapsulates the negative effects, their interrelatedness with the individual in prison, and the mutuality of them. Arditti uses an ecological approach, from a family systems perspective, to illustrate the harms caused by imprisonment on families (Arditti, 2005; Arditti, 2012b). This approach helps in highlighting the interrelatedness, also cited by Condry and Minson (2020), of the experience and the different levels it operates on. Using this approach as a starting point, **Chapter 4** aligns this with trauma theory to envisage the impact of maternal imprisonment as one of 'intergenerational trauma'.

3.5.2 Effects on children

There is already evidence that parental, and in particular mothers' imprisonment has a great impact on children and young people's mental health (Murray, 2007; Burgess and Flynn, 2013; DeHart, Shapiro and Clone, 2018). Tasca *et al.* (2014), found that children of incarcerated mothers are more likely to experience mental ill-health than those of incarcerated fathers. This includes stigma surrounding having a parent in prison (Minson, 2019a), the trauma of the arrest, separation issues, and anxiety stemming from not being clear about what will happen to themselves or their parent. Women's imprisonment may have more effect on the family than men's, due to the likelihood of women having main or even sole caring responsibilities. Children are therefore unlikely to stay in the family home (Caddle and Crisp, 1997), with significant proportions of children going into care. Parental imprisonment will also have financial consequences on a family which adds further stress to the situation (Murray, 2007; DeHart, Shapiro and Clone, 2018). DeHart, Shapiro and Clone (2018) describe how the stigma of prison can lead to a reduction in support in the community, as people withdraw from the family of the imprisoned person due to stigmatisation.

Children may not be told about what has happened in terms of why their parent has been imprisoned or how long they will be imprisoned for. This may lead them to blame themselves or to be at increased risk of developing mental health problems (Hinshaw, 2005). Arditti (2012a) describes the incarceration of a parent as an ACE (Adverse Childhood Experience). This is described as a traumatic experience that serves as a "pathway for social, emotional and cognitive impairments" p.181.

Epstein (2013) provides evidence that courts do not necessarily take into account the rights of children when sentencing mothers. She argues that this constitutes a breach of children's human rights as they are effectively being punished for their mother's wrongdoing. Epstein (2014) discusses the nature of the offences women received custodial sentences for, such as benefit fraud and council tax debt, highlighting the continuing use of prison for low risk and non-violent offenders. Minson (2019a), discusses the stigmatisation of children of imprisoned mothers using the term 'state-initiated separation' from a parent to describe their situation. The research uncovered the extreme grief felt by children, which was a direct consequence of their mother's imprisonment by the state. Arditti (2012b, p. 68) notes how relationships between mothers and children can disintegrate "beyond repair" after maternal incarceration, illustrating the intergenerational trauma it causes.

Wider ongoing impacts for children can include issues with school attendance and performance, higher rates of mental ill-health and anti-social and offending behaviour. Murray and Farrington (2008) in a review of research evidence in this field found the occurrence of anti-social behaviour trebled for children with a parent in prison and the risk of mental health problems doubled. However, it is not possible to say confidently that parental imprisonment has a causal effect, as this may reflect pre-existing disadvantage and marginalisation in families. It may also be dependent on the age of the child, the length of sentence the parent serves, and what their role in the family was prior to imprisonment. Most researchers agree that the separation of children from parents by imprisonment is a traumatic experience. However, it is critical to avoid assuming that children will have lifelong effects, thus being in danger of effectively writing them off. How the imprisonment and subsequent care of the child is managed is also likely to be crucial. Condry and Scharff-Smith (2018), for instance, emphasise the impact across time for families that can lead to destruction of the family. These issues do not stop when a parent is released.

It is also important not to overlook the impact of maternal imprisonment on non-dependent children (those over 18), which can also be profound but is less well

researched. OpenClasp Theatre's recent production 'Don't Forget the Birds' depicts this experience from both a daughter and her mother's perspective. This production based on real experiences, highlights how suddenly being left to run the family home and live independently can be difficult for young adults or those with additional needs (Open Clasp, 2018). Research in this field is less extensive, with most research focusing on dependent children.

3.5.3 Impact on kinship carers

Those caring for the children of women in prison are another group affected by imprisonment who are often ignored by policy and research in this area. In many cases they have to move house and stop working in order to undertake the role (Raikes, 2016; Hairston, 2003). They may already be caring for other children or grandchildren and their physical health may be impacted. Research in this area is particularly sparse in the UK context, with much of the research focusing on the offender or their children. In many cases, carers feel they have no choice but to take on the role as otherwise the children may end up in the care system. They also have to deal with stigma in the local community and may be left to inform their grandchildren of where mum is and why (Raikes, 2016; Lockwood and Raikes, 2015). All of this may result in poor mental health and, loss of social life, and have an impact on other family members (the Independent, 2012; Young and Smith, 2000).

Bachman and Chase-Lansdale (2005) detail the impact that caring full time for grandchildren has on grandmothers, who are often already on low incomes. The main factor observed was a decrease in physical health and financial stability. The added pressures of maintaining contact with the person in prison adds to the burden. As detailed in **Section 3.4.1,** visiting can be time-consuming, costly and emotionally draining. It can also be very emotionally disruptive for children. Maintaining a good relationship with the person in prison, can raise difficulties in itself.

3.6 Summary: wider impacts and intergenerational trauma

This chapter has outlined the impact of maternal imprisonment on children and families. It has shown how often mothers have to make difficult choices about whether to bring infants into prison with them, at the risk of moving further away from other children. Being separated from children is consistently cited as the most painful element of custody for mothers, and one that causes them much distress and trauma.

Research shows that children and families of mothers in prison endure many difficulties both practical and emotional, and little support is provided for them. Maternal imprisonment has wide-reaching and traumatic effects for mothers, their children and wider family members. The evidence shows that children are the additional victims of mothers' imprisonment and that, in many cases, relationships can be broken down permanently due to both practical and psychological barriers. What is not always demonstrated is the ongoing, extensive damage that is passed on to the next generation and beyond by the incarceration of women who have dependent children, which can be described as 'intergenerational trauma'.

Maternal imprisonment risks the mental health and wellbeing of both mothers and their children and can lead to the intergenerational transfer of social exclusion. This can include problems at school for children, poor mental wellbeing and the development of anger and distrust of authority. Many children will not be able to visit their mothers in prison and those that do can find the experience difficult in itself. Kinship carers, who are often grandmothers, also endure difficulties such as loss of income and poor mental and physical health. This all contributes to the intergenerational traumatic impact of maternal imprisonment.

Chapter 4: A framework for understanding maternal imprisonment

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the framework used within the research for understanding and describing maternal imprisonment and its impact on mothers, children and families. The framework was devised as a result of prior reading, my own experiences as a practitioner and the developing focus of the study. It was influenced by trauma theory, feminist theory and socio-ecological approaches, in addition to narrative approaches to qualitative research. Meetings with those involved in the research fieldwork from both the voluntary sector and a community rehabilitation company working with women, in addition to voluntary work undertaken with national and local charitable organisations, and time spent attending the women's hubs operated by a Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC), also shaped the approach taken to the research study. My background of working with women with mental health needs and those involved in the criminal justice system added additional influences to the approach taken. This chapter will therefore put forward a model for understanding the impact of maternal imprisonment on multiple levels: individual, family, community and societal. It will begin by outlining the socio-ecological approach and analysing how it can be used to understand the context of maternal imprisonment. Following this, it will detail how trauma theories, and in particular ideas around intergenerational trauma, as outlined in **Chapter 2**, have influenced the research framework.

4.2 Socio-ecological approach

4.2.1 The origins of the socio-ecological approach

This section describes how a socio-ecological approach can be used to better understand women's pathways to offending and imprisonment and the wider impact on their families. There is a body of research that has examined factors affecting women's offending behaviour, which often focuses predominantly on individual factors in women's lives (DeHart, 2008; Fournier *et al.*, 2011). Research has identified that significant numbers of criminalised women have experienced adverse life experiences such as abuse, sexual violence and other trauma (Green *et al.*, 2005; Belknap, Lynch and DeHart, 2016; McDaniels-Wilson and Belknap, 2008), as described in **Chapter 2**. Focusing on individual factors such as these is a valid approach, but it tends to centre the issues on the individual rather than looking at the wider structural influences in play on women's lives, and the interplay between these and individual and family factors. Framing trauma from a sociological viewpoint allows understanding of the lived experience of criminalised women and the social and structural barriers they face.

An ecological approach attempts to look beyond individual factors, and therefore individual culpability, to identify the wider influences on people's lives. It places an emphasis on factors at different levels, and examines the interactions between these factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). In this way it attempts to combine both an individual based and a purely environmental based approach. By taking a different perspective, we can discover more about the wider influences on people's lives in order to best assist them to overcome any barriers and better address complex issues such as offending behaviour.

An ecological approach is multi-disciplinary, stemming from social sciences and specifically being used within community psychology. It has a history of use as an approach within social work practice, being aligned with family process perspectives and the use of genograms and ecomaps when working with families and children (Shapiro and DiZerega, 2012; Belsky, 1980). It has been utilised less frequently within criminology, primarily to look at violence against women and girls, as a way of explaining and understanding women's responses and help-seeking behaviour in this context (Bliss, Cook and Kaslow, 2007; Campbell, Dworkin and Cabral, 2009).

'Ecological' in this context refers to the study of the relationships between living organisms and their environment. This type of ecological approach was first described by the psychologist Bronfenbrenner (1977), who described an approach to considering children's relationships with the environment within which they lived. It began as a way of combining what, at the time, were perceived as competing, naturalistic and experimental approaches (i.e., studying people in their natural setting versus studying people in a laboratory). Bronfenbrenner described the environment as a nested system of structures emanating out from an individual, consisting of a microsystem, exosystem and macrosystem (see **Figure 4.1**). Other researchers, went on to build on Bronfenbrenner's approach and use it to attempt to understand situations such as child abuse (Belsky, 1980) and domestic violence (Carlson, 1984).

Figure 4.1: Bronfenbrenner (1977) ecological systems
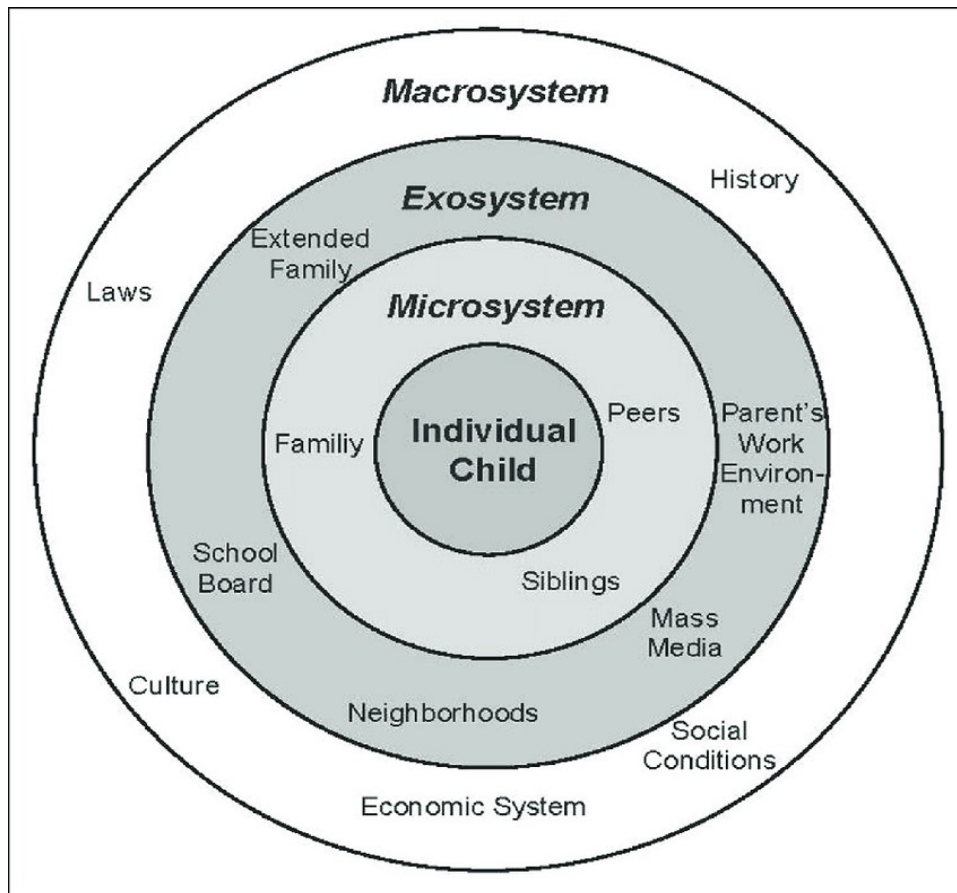
In psychology this approach is the primary one used within the field of 'community' psychology. Community psychology applies an ecological systems framework (based on Bronfenbrenner, 1977) to understand and explain the relationships between individuals, communities and wider society. It is a branch of psychology that examines the ways individuals interact with other individuals, social groups, societal institutions, culture, and the environment. Within the sphere of social work, which tends to draw on theory from sociology, psychology and criminology, an ecological approach is similarly described as useful for analysing complex problems, looking at factors operating at different levels and their interactions (Kirst-Ashman and Hull Jr, 2014). In social work practice, ecological approaches aim to improve the level of fit between a person and their environment. This may also incorporate life story work and family systems approaches to working with children and families.

Within criminology, historically, 'ecological' takes on a slightly different meaning. In the 1920s, the Chicago school developed an 'ecological' approach to the study of social life. This was later used to examine crime and deviance in American inner cities with an emphasis on 'social disorganization' (Newburn, 2017). Shaw and McKay (1942)

described a 'zone of transition', within urban areas, which had high rates of crime and deviance. Criticisms of this analysis included that this theory sees people as merely reacting to external, environmental stimuli. Other explanations focus more on 'social' ecology as pertaining to the environment or space that people operate in, therefore focusing more on human geography (McLaughlin and Muncie, 2006) and influencing environmental criminology (Brantingham and Brantingham, 2013). Socio-ecological approaches have been used infrequently when looking at other issues within wider criminology such as imprisonment. One exception is Arditti (Arditti, 2012b; Arditti, 2005) who has regularly adopted this approach when seeking to understand the effects of parental incarceration on children and their families in the United States. Young and Smith (2000) also used this framework when evaluating research concerning programmes for supporting incarcerated mothers, also in the United States. Heberle, Obus and Gray (2020) have more recently utilised this approach to describe state-perpetrated violence on marginalised communities.

Across disciplines including psychology, health, social work and sociology, this approach has since been used to look at childhood abuse (Belsky, 1980), health outcomes (McLaren and Hawe, 2005) and in particular, family relationships and interpersonal violence (Heise, 1998; Bliss, Cook and Kaslow, 2007; Campbell, Dworkin and Cabral, 2009). It has been cited as a useful way of looking at complex problems particularly as it is "sensitive to contextual factors in the environment and diverse family structures" (Arditti, 2005, p. 251). In addition to identifying negative influences on people's lives, this approach aims to uncover strengths, support systems and coping skills by taking a holistic approach to studying people's life situations. Young and Smith (2000) describe how it can be used to take an intersectional approach, by recognising the role of race, gender and class. It can therefore enable a greater understanding of the interaction between the influence of society and the community on individual's life experiences.

4.2.2 The socio-ecological framework

The main features of a socio-ecological approach include seeing an individual in relation to their environment, often described as 'person in environment' and having 'person in environment fit'. The social environment is comprised of the individuals, groups, organisations and other systems with which the person comes into contact (Young and Smith, 2000). The relationship between the person and their environment is seen as mutually influencing and reciprocal. Although ecological theory does not establish cause and effect, the way that an individual is influenced by their environment

and vice-versa can be analysed. In addition, cultural and historical influences such as gender and race can be considered (Kirst-Ashman and Hull Jr, 2014). How an individual responds and interprets experiences is therefore also shaped by their own personal experiences and identity, including their race, class and gender. This approach allows consideration of the strengths and deficits of an individual, their family, and their environment, rather than looking at all of these aspects separately.

Ecological theory sees individuals as in a constant state of interaction with the systems with which they are in contact, such as family, friends, work, school and political systems, as well as welfare and criminal justice systems (Kirst-Ashman and Hull Jr, 2014). These interactions are generally envisaged as operating at several different levels, which can have slightly different labels or interpretations. In general, they include personal (individual), micro-, exo- and macro- levels (see **Figure 4.1**) but some frameworks also include the meso-system, which represents interplay between various levels, and a further level named the chronosystem, concerning transitions and events. These levels have been described in different ways by researchers depending on their specific field of study (Heise, 1998; Young and Smith, 2000; Javdani, 2013; Belsky, 1980; Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Arditti, 2005). Javdani, Sadeh and Verona (2011), for instance, argue that gender operates at multiple levels insofar as it characterises individuals and structures social norms, operating in the form of gender norms and power dynamics.

Figure 4.2: Ecological levels of interaction (adapted from various sources)

Level	Description
1. **Individual/personal factors**	Family background, values, prior experiences or what each individual brings to their behaviour and relationships.
2. **Microsystem**	Proximal family relationships. Including with children, with intimate partners and other family members, quality and nature of relationships.
3. **Exosystem**	Formal and informal institutions, criminal justice systems, community responses, work/unemployment, neighbourhood.
4. **Macrosystem**	Cultural norms, values and beliefs, gender roles, stigma, VAWG, political systems, society, views and attitudes of culture at large.

Socio-ecological approaches can help with analysis and understanding of complex problems that operate at many different levels (Kirst-Ashman and Hull Jr, 2014). They can help to shift the focus away from individuals, to also identify social structures and systems which impact marginalized communities and operate at structural levels. This allows greater understanding of the interplay between individual, family and community factors operating in peoples' lives, thus helping us to formulate more holistic support for families.

This approach, does not, however, identify cause and effect relationships, in-so-far as it cannot tell us what has more weight in a given situation, or what the causal factors are. There is also perhaps a danger of removing agency from individuals if a more systemic and structural understanding of problems is adopted. Another criticism may be that this approach does not, and cannot, identify all of the factors that may influence an individual and their environment at any given level: there will always be omissions (Carlson, 1984). However, it does give a way of conceptualising the many factors at play in women's lives, and can therefore enable a wider, comprehensive understanding of issues such as maternal imprisonment.

4.3 Socio-ecological approaches to research with women

4.3.1 Violence against women and girls

Ecological approaches have long been used to understand and explain violence against women and girls. Such an approach can seek to identify factors operating at different levels instead of focusing on individuals, which can inevitably lead to victim-blaming. It can also be utilised to examine mediating factors, coping and resilience. Heise (1998) used an ecological framework to seek to explain violence against women, taking into account both societal and individual factors. She describes it as a "multifaceted phenomenon grounded in an interplay among personal, situational, and sociocultural factors" (Heise, 1998, p. 263). Javdani, Sadeh and Verona (2011) reviewed literature on female antisocial behaviour in order to identify how gender operates at individual and ecological levels of influence. They found that this approach enabled them to view gender at both the individual level and a wider social level, concluding that "gender operates at multiple levels of analysis" (p.1326).

Bliss, Cook and Kaslow (2007) researched the responses of women in prison to abusive relationships, using an ecological approach to look at the wider context of women's lives. This highlighted how women's responses were dependent on much more than interpersonal or individual differences. In this way, responses to abuse can be seen as dependent on wider societal factors. Similarly, Campbell, Dworkin and

Cabral (2009) describe the cumulative nature of women's victimisation using an ecological approach to investigate sexual assault. This enabled a reduced focus on victim characteristics instead exploring sociocultural influence, aspects of sexual assaults and responses to help-seeking. Grauerholz (2000) used an ecological model to investigate sociocultural factors related to sexual revictimisation. Again, this approach was used in order to move way from solely focussing on factors within individual victims. Similarly, Lauritsen and Schaum (2004) investigated individual, family and community characteristics of those who had experienced interpersonal violence, finding that violence was related to both family and community factors.

As many women and mothers in the prison system have experienced intimate partner violence, it is evident how these approaches may also tie in to researching maternal imprisonment. Research has detailed how the majority of women in the prison system have experienced gender-based violence, either within an intimate relationship or elsewhere in their family or community (Segrave and Carlton, 2010). This links into my specific interest in how this approach can be used to examine factors influencing the lives of mothers in prison, in particular their relationships with their children and other family members in the context of imprisonment. I have therefore adapted this approach to relate to the issues surrounding maternal imprisonment and to investigate the intergenerational effects on family members.

4.3.2 Women's offending and imprisonment

It can be identified that there are many different layers of influence on criminalised women's lives. These range from individual factors, such as a history of trauma, abuse and mental ill-health, to community factors, like exclusion from school and unemployment, through to wider factors including poverty, gender norms and constructions of motherhood. Mothers who offend may be seen by society as 'doubly deviant' (Carlen, 1983) as it is often viewed as abnormal for mothers, in particular, to commit criminal offences. Much research and policy in this area centres on identifying individual factors that have led to offending particularly trauma history, mental health needs and substance abuse issues. The increasingly neo-liberal approach to dealing with offenders as Comack (2018) describes, expects women in prison to become responsible for their own 'self-governance' or self-improvement. Much policy emphasis is thus placed on 'fixing' individuals, rather than looking at how wider systems impact on people's lives.

An ecological approach is also a useful way of looking at the intergenerational impact of offending and imprisonment. This is of particular relevance to the imprisonment of

women because it is still the case that women are much more likely to be the main carer of children, so their imprisonment can have devastating effects on the family, with consequences that can affect present and future generations substantially. When a father is imprisoned, in the majority of cases there will be a female partner on the outside who continues to provide care for any children (Corston, 2007). This is not generally the case when mothers are sentenced to prison, as outlined in **Chapter 3**. A small number of researchers have utilised elements of ecological approaches to understand women who have offended and women in prison, as outlined below.

Arditti (2005) uses an ecological approach to investigate parental incarceration and its impact on children and families. She uses the approach to highlight the connections between issues such as crime and poverty identifying 'protective factors' in addition to challenges. She favours this approach in order to avoid further stigma or apportioning blame to families. As Arditti (2005, p. 252) states, ecological theories, "provide interpretative power in terms of contextualizing the experience of imprisonment and highlighting the interrelatedness of social problems such as crime and poverty". DeHart (2008) looked at the role of victimisation in women's pathways to prison. Although not taking a specifically ecological approach, she notes that dislocation from systems and structures is a factor in women's offending, for example, explaining how the effects of abuse may be widespread and lead to withdrawal from school, home and work life. Victimisation histories also affect relationships with peers and families. Again, the cumulative impact of victimisation and trauma is seen as paramount in understanding women's life choices. Poehlmann *et al.* (2010) carried out a review of parent-child contact when parents are incarcerated, using an ecological framework to analyse the different studies and issues identified within them. Factors identified include those relating to the microsystem (attachment, contact with parents), mesosystem (parent-caregiver relationships), and exosystem (poverty, stress, gender). Poehlmann *et al.* (2010) further conclude that children of incarcerated mothers experience more trauma than those of imprisoned fathers on a number of levels.

4.4 Incorporating trauma theories

The research study integrates elements of socio-ecological theory with trauma theory, particularly in relation to the concept of inter-generational trauma and feminist approaches (Burstow, 2003). This approach integrates different theorists' interpretations of ecological theory including Heise's (1998) application of it to violence against women (see **Section 4.3.1**), and Arditti (2005) and her application to families affected by incarceration (see **Section 4.3.2**). It also incorporates ideas around

intergenerational trauma, as cited by Menzies (2010) and Heberle, Obus and Gray (2020)– relating these ideas to how mothers in prison and children on the outside cope with separation. Heberle, Obus and Gray (2020, p. 814) describe maternal imprisonment as "state-perpetrated violence" and understand this in terms of trauma being perpetuated through "formal social systems". Young and Smith (2000) show how mothers and their children are affected by each other's responses to the situation, in addition to kinship carers.

As outlined above, an ecological approach is a useful way of integrating data on individual, family, community and societal factors impacting on people's lives. It has particular relevance to groups of people who may be disadvantaged or marginalised within communities. It can therefore be seen that the use of this approach to examine the issues affecting women and children involved in the Criminal Justice System has relevance in terms of identifying both sources of disadvantage - such as trauma, poverty, sexual violence - and also strengths and supports. In this way it is possible to attain a more detailed picture of the challenges facing women who may be imprisoned and their families. Additionally, in terms of wider community and society, a comparison can be made with the literature on 'intergenerational' or 'community' trauma, which looks at how wider structural and community influences play out on people's lives reproducing trauma, disadvantage and inequality. One example is Menzies (2010), who details the impact of family, community and wider society on reproducing and re-inflicting trauma on Aboriginal communities.

In recent years, the word 'trauma' has begun to be used more widely across many fields of practice and disciplines. In particular, the idea of being 'trauma-informed' or having a 'trauma-informed approach' has become increasingly important for many organisations. In some senses the word 'trauma' has begun to mean many things to many people; however, many women in the criminal justice system may not describe themselves as 'traumatised'. Research has suggested that up to 98% of women in the criminal justice system may have experienced trauma in their lives, in the form of sexual violence, domestic violence and abuse, and child abuse (Green *et al.*, 2005). My research has used a sociological interpretation of the term 'trauma' to also encompass the trauma of separation from children, the pains of imprisonment and the difficulties in re-entering society thereafter. This reflects my thinking regarding the idea of 'trauma' as a wider sociological construct that may be present at different levels within our environments. In many ways these women were traumatised by their experiences at the hands of the state. The idea of intergenerational trauma, as a way of describing both trauma experienced directly, and that passed on to the next

generation, was one which fitted well with my area of interest. I particularly drew on studies of Aboriginal and other indigenous peoples that interpreted intergenerational trauma as much as a social issue as an individual one, and that identified the role of structural agencies within this (Menzies, 2010; Braveheart-Jordan and DeBruyn, 1995).

Menzies (2010, p. 78) uses a diagram to illustrate his ideas around intergenerational trauma and its impact on individuals and communities (see **Figure 4.3**). This fits into the nested model approach utilised by studies taking a socio-ecological approach, as it similarly looks at trauma as enacted upon individuals, families, communities and nations.

Figure 4.3: The intergenerational trauma model (Menzies, 2010)
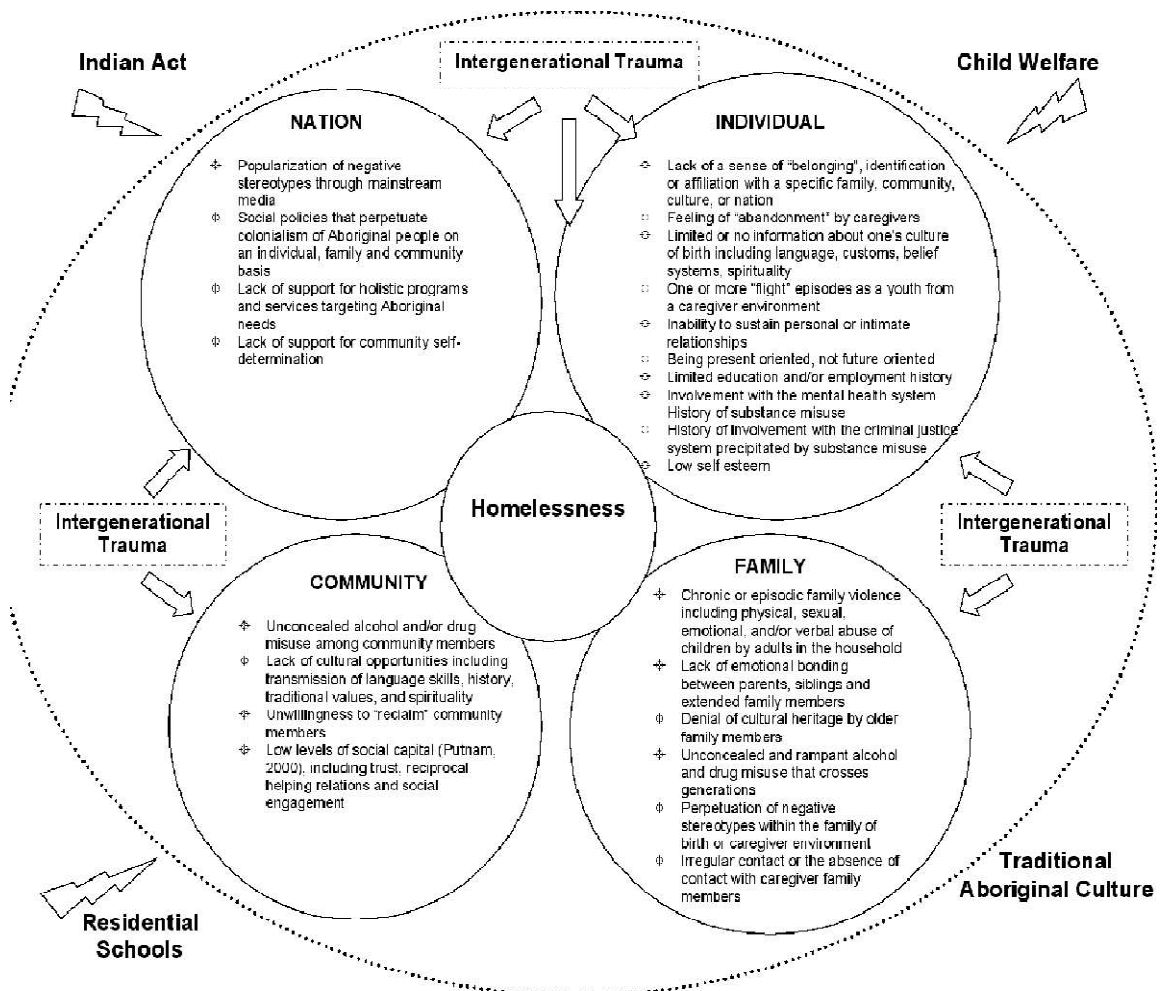
I have adapted this model, in combination with ideas from socio-ecological approaches, to construct a way of conceptualising maternal imprisonment, and understanding the harm caused to mothers and their children and families. Utilising these two combined approaches has allowed me to develop an original way of understanding the harms

caused by maternal imprisonment, that encompasses their breadth, depth and intergenerational impacts. In this way, the harms caused by state-initiated separation of mother and child can be understood as having mutual influence. As Young and Smith (2000, p. 135) describe, "a mother's incarceration drastically alters her own day-to-day environment, as well as her child's, and the kinship care provider's environments"; how they in turn respond to her incarceration will also affect the mother, and vice-versa. We cannot look at each of these reactions in isolation. This model allows us to conceptualise both the different levels of influence operating on people's lives, and also the ongoing traumatic nature of the experience of maternal imprisonment, and the wide-reaching impacts it can have. This has influenced how the research itself was conducted, and the data collection tools utilised; it shaped how analysis was carried out and was also a way of conceptualising my findings.

Figure 4.4: A proposed socio-ecological framework for conceptualising maternal imprisonment

Systemic level:	1. Personal (individual)	2. Family (micro)	3. Community (exo)	4. Society (macro)
Description:	Prior life experiences, trauma.	Family relationships and interactions.	Institutions and social structures.	Views and attitudes of culture/society.
Factors:	Pre-existing mental health. Childhood experiences. Personal characteristics.	Parenting/children Domestic abuse/IPV. Relationship breakdown. Removal of children to care.	Neighbourhood Employment State agencies (CJS, social services) Social networks.	Views of criminalised women. Gender roles. VAWG Poverty.

4.5 Summary

This chapter has outlined the multi-disciplinary theoretical influences on the research and how they have shaped the choices made in research design. This includes an outline of socio-ecological approaches and an analysis of how they have been applied to different contexts in different disciplines. It has also shown how this approach can be used to understand the needs of marginalised women, particularly those who have been in contact with the criminal justice system. It has described how I have combined socio-ecological approaches, with trauma theory, in order to develop a framework for describing and understanding the impact of maternal imprisonment. This has resulted in an original way of approaching issues around maternal imprisonment. The following chapter will describe the methods used to carry out the research and the methodological choices made as the research process unfolded.

Chapter 5: Methodology

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will outline the details of the research process and the decisions made as the process unfolded. This included gaining formal approval to carry out the research, engaging with agencies working with women who have been in the prison system and the process of conducting interviews. There will also be detailed analysis of how ethical decisions were made, the limitations of the study and how the data was analysed. The chapter demonstrates how the research problem informed the choice of design and the coherence between the epistemology, theory and research methods used.

The chapter will also outline why it is relevant to use narrative approaches as a way of understanding the experiences of mothers who have experienced a period of custody. This approach to the study has been influenced by my previous practitioner experience, feminist trauma theory and narrative approaches to qualitative research with marginalised groups. The chapter is divided into seen sections outlining the methodology used to conduct the research study. It begins by detailing the formal approvals processes and research design, followed by the ontological and epistemological approaches taken, decisions made regarding permissions to work with people involved in the criminal justice system and the ethical approvals required. The following section describes ethical considerations and gives a reflexive account of the wider research activities carried out, in order to increase knowledge and understanding of the criminal justice system and its organisations. A detailed description of the fieldwork process itself, including data collection is then outlined, followed by the final section of this chapter which concerns the data analysis and interpretation process. Within the final section the mothers who were involved in the research are presented.

5.2 Research design

Overview

This qualitative research aimed to add to knowledge around the role of inter-generational trauma, and how maternal imprisonment depletes the human and social resources of the family. It set out to identify how mothers cope during imprisonment and the impact this has on re-entering the community. Informed by trauma theory and socio-ecological approaches, it used this framework (as outlined in **Chapter 4**) to understand the impact of maternal imprisonment using narratives from mothers who have been in prison, supported by interviews with practitioners working with women in the community.

Aims:

• To explore the role of inter-generational trauma in the lives of mothers who have experienced prison.

• To identify how maternal imprisonment depletes the human and social resources of the family.

• To identify what works to support mothers in and after prison and the coping techniques they use to deal with imprisonment.

Primary research questions:

- What evidence is there of the existence of trauma in mother's lives prior to going to prison and what effect does it have?
- How are mothers' lives affected by imprisonment and how do they maintain relationships with their children?
- Do the intergenerational harms of maternal imprisonment persist after the period of custody?

Research activities:

- 10 semi-structured interviews with staff working with mothers who have been in prison and women who have offended in the community.
- 19 semi-structured interviews with mothers who have direct experience of imprisonment.
- Interviews were transcribed in full and thematic narrative analysis was utilised to draw out findings.

5.3 The ontological and epistemological basis for the research

This research study focuses on women's direct experiences of prison and the criminal justice system; it therefore makes certain assumptions about the nature of truth and reality. The principle assumption is that women who have had these experiences have a certain knowledge, truth or viewpoint that can then be interpreted to produce understanding of gendered social existence (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 1999). There is an underlying assumption that women's understanding of their experience and their interpretation of it is a source of valid knowledge (Smith, 1987). This is not to say that other truths do not exist: prison staff may interpret those same women's actions, behaviours and emotions in different ways; there may be other versions from families,

police, probation and court staff as to how their situation transpired, and what happened, and why. However, this research is less concerned with the factual nature of women's sentences, and offences and centres on their own interpretations of how the process of involvement in the criminal justice system made themselves and their families feel, and the effect that this had on their lives. In this way, it is valid to interpret women's narratives as a way of understanding their experiences of the impact that prison had on them.

There is the belief that there is a certain truth or reality in a person's understanding of an event and how they experience it, even though others may hold differing views and interpret said events in a different way. The justification for relying heavily on women's direct voices is an attempt to uncover marginalised and little heard voices and to understand their interpretations of events in their lives (Hesse-Biber, 2013). I approached the research from the perspective that the women's experiences or narratives are their 'truths'; therefore, I have not sought to verify what they said or catch them out. The research uncovered different stories and gave vulnerable, victimised women, a voice, regarding what happened to them when they were separated from their children by the state. Their knowledge and experiences are valid truths, as they are the best truthtellers of their own experiences. Interviews with staff gave background information on what they felt women had found difficult and the issues they encountered, adding validity to the women's voices (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). The ontological approach followed sees reality as based on what people perceive; having said that, I do not feel that there is no fixed reality: there are different ways of viewing the same situation, but there are still concrete realities to be observed, just different ways of understanding them.

5.3.1 Feminist approaches to qualitative research

My previous professional role entailed working within a women's mental health charity as a domestic violence worker. This has given me a set of experiences from which the approach to this research emerged; namely a woman-centred approach, a desire to reflect marginalised women's experiences, and a viewpoint that structural systems have also had a large impact on individual women's life situations and consequent emotional health. I have therefore approached the research from a woman's standpoint (Harding, 1987; Smith, 1987), whilst also acknowledging criticisms of this approach, such that there is a danger of reducing women's experiences to that of a group and not accounting for individual differences (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). I also acknowledge my position within the research as a privileged, white, female academic.

Although my core beliefs come partly from my experiences as a practitioner, I have aligned these beliefs with academic theory that provides a close fit, as outlined in the following section.

"Research projects can be thought of as feminist if they are framed by feminist theory, and aim to produce knowledge that will be useful for effective transformation of gendered injustice and subordination." Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002, p. 147).

In a broad sense, the fact that I was carrying out research investigating mothers' experiences of custody and trauma led me towards feminist methodologies, although that did not in itself make the research approach 'feminist'. The research does, however, fit feminist practice by virtue of the following: seeking to give voice to marginalised groups via women's voices and women's experiences, and identifying how women are doubly punished by criminal justice systems and social inequality (Hesse-Biber, 2013). In this way the choice of using semi-structured qualitative interviews and narrative analysis also fits with this methodological approach. The research also aimed to demonstrate a commitment to social change by incorporating a practitioner perspective, as outlined in Mason and Stubbs (2010). As Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002, p. 147) suggest, the research aims to give, "insights into gendered social existence that would otherwise not exist". The research approach was influenced by woman's standpoint theory, which was developed by writers such as Harding (1987) and Smith (1987). It could be argued that the decision to use qualitative interviews does not make the research 'feminist', although many feminist researchers have centred on using interviews particularly semi-structured and narrative ones. Hesse-Biber (2013), for instance, discusses how knowledge may have stronger objectivity if it emerges from subordinated groups.

Throughout my research it has been important to avoid the issues surrounding 'damage-centred research', as Tuck (2009) describes. Although prison is often a difficult and negative experience for many, dwelling too much on negative aspects and failing to identify what has helped and what does need to change is unhelpful. Most women in this situation do not necessarily want to be perceived solely as passive victims of circumstances; in many cases the opposite is true: these are very strong individuals who have endured difficult circumstances and somehow found a path through this. There is something that does not sit well, for me as the researcher, with observing and describing the pain of other peoples' lives, from the safety of one's own home. As (Tuck, 2009, p. 416) explains, it is important in order to avoid damage-centred research to,

"document not only the painful elements of social realities but also the wisdom and hope"

To avoid both this viewpoint and the risk of locating the causes of offending behaviour within individuals (Javdani, 2013) it was important to look at individual circumstances alongside wider community and societal influences. This enabled moving away from a focus on individuals and helped me to seek to identify positives and highlight what does work for women and families in this situation. It also enabled acknowledgment of the contradictions and complexities in peoples' lives which contribute to the series of events resulting in their incarceration.

5.3.2 Using narrative approaches in qualitative research

There are a number of ideas as to what constitutes a 'narrative' in this sense, so it is useful to begin by formulating some kind of usable definition. Riessman (1993, p. 3) describes it as "talk organized around consequential events" putting an emphasis on narratives as representations that structure our lives and experiences. Others place an emphasis on narratives being about past events, having chronological sequence or a beginning, middle and end (Labov, 1967). There can also be crossover with life histories (Mishler, 1991), although these are usually seen as longer, more in-depth accounts. Some narrative researchers make a distinction between 'narratives' and 'stories' (Mishler, 1991). Narratives are often described as co-constructed by the listener or audience and the teller; for this reason, the researcher needs to be mindful of their role within the process. Narratives have also been described as how people make sense of life, especially as a way of making sense of experiences, and particularly traumatic ones (van Ginneken, 2016). Squire *et al.* (2014) suggest that narrative approaches are well suited to sensitive topics, as the researcher is not usually following a strict set of questions or agenda. This reflects my intended approach: I hoped to give respondents as much control of the interview situation as I could, in order that they were able to talk about the issues that they felt comfortable disclosing to me.

It has been argued that narrative approaches can get to the truths of our experiences (Hall, 2011), which is particularly relevant when talking about trauma. As outlined above I took on the assumption that 'women are experts on their own experiences' and used this as a way of understanding lives of criminalised mothers. As discussed above there are differing viewpoints as to how valid the truths of peoples' experiences are, as we may all experience events differently. However, as Squire *et al.* (2014, p. 8) argue, narrative approaches aim to uncover what "stories can tell them about the narrators and their worlds". Narrative research may therefore be less concerned with finding a

single truth, and more concerned with how meaning is constructed from experience. Hall (2011) suggests that narratives capture the complexities of experience, but that there is no singular interpretation or absolute truth of a text. Some researchers may place more emphasis on how the story is told, rather than what is actually said within it. As I was interested in how women felt when they were involved with the criminal justice system, rather than specifically 'what' happened to them, I felt that a narrative approach was valid as a way of understanding people's differing experiences of this process (Woodiwiss, 2017).

Squire *et al.* (2014, p. 56) outline how, with some experiences, women had stories about abuse and trauma that society suggests "cannot be told", but, for political as well as personal reasons, they are perhaps stories that do need to be told, as they raise difficult and uncomfortable questions for society. This opportunity to talk about these issues may have the potential to be a positive healing experience if dealt with in a sensitive way, on the respondents' own terms. However, Boonzaier in Fleetwood *et al.* (2019, p. 468) suggests that researchers need to be careful to avoid "perpetuating marginalisation" by telling repeated stories of pain and suffering; we therefore need to consider what comes out of the research that is positive for the future (see **Section 4.4**). In this way, careful consideration is required by the researcher in terms of how we tell these stories, what we focus on, what we leave out and how we portray the individuals within them. Viewing women as passive victims of events in their lives is not particularly helpful for anyone involved.

5.3.3 Semi-Structured interviews in research

Semi-structured interviews were utilised with practitioners in order to gather their experiences and gain insight into their understanding of working with women, in particular mothers in the criminal justice system. These interviews were not gathering data on practitioners' own life experiences, therefore a slightly different approach was relevant to the narrative interviews (see **Section 5.3.2**) utilised with mothers who had been in custody. Semi-structured interviews are useful for assessing people's understanding of situations and constructions of reality (Punch, 2005). Minichiello et al suggest a continuum model for interviews ranging from fully structured through to unstructured oral and life history interviews (Punch, 2005). In this way, different types of interview can be seen as suited to different situations.

In this case, an element of structure and standardisation was useful in order to cover a set range of topics with people who carried out similar job roles. Additionally, time constraints during the working day meant that some structure was needed to ensure

that all topics were covered within the set time available. Prompts were used where more information was implied or required and there was still leeway given for particular areas of focus as necessary. This more standardised approach was useful when it came to comparing responses and the weight given to different themes that were raised.

As I had some experience first-hand as a practitioner within this field, I had some idea of the type of questions/topics I wanted to discuss. Semi-structured interviews were thus chosen as a means of providing rich and detailed information from multiple perspectives on the main issues arising working with women involved in the criminal justice system. This research method is useful for understanding viewpoints of key stakeholders as it allows the respondent to participate in the process and discuss concerns that are of particular importance within that environment. Semi-structured interviews allow room for negotiation, discussion and expansion (Mann, 2016).

Coding was utilised as an important part of the analysis in order to create themes from the data produced. Coding, as Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest, involves creating labels in order to reduce the amount of content. This can also be a drawback as there is a danger of losing important information, causing possible confusion over meaning (Harding, 2018). This process was aided using NVIVO for the interviews with practitioners. On initial reading a large number of codes were produced and these were then combined in many cases into related themes. At this stage mind-maps were also produced as another aid to data analysis and understanding.

5.4 Approvals processes

A research strategy is needed in order to answer research questions in an appropriate way and should underpin the choices and methods chosen (Punch, 2005). Research within the criminal justice system in the UK and other jurisdictions, may also be impacted by the need to gain formal approval to carry out research within these agencies. This process may alter the initial plans and change to some extent the way that data is collected (Wincup, 2017). Research planning must therefore be flexible and dynamic in order to adjust to changes and circumstances. Working with marginalised groups can also mean that unexpected issues may arise, and situations may change. The process of planning and designing the research study is outlined in detail in the following section.

5.4.1 Decision making

The initial stages of the research process involved seeking opportunities to attend events related to criminal justice, and particularly the prison system, in order to engage in networking activity. I had some links with organisations through my previous work role and through various acquaintances, which, as Wincup (2017) describes, were useful to draw upon. Working outside of statutory services, I had limited knowledge of the way the system worked which was, in many ways, beneficial as I did not hold preconceived ideas, but on the other hand, meant I felt somewhat like an unknowledgeable intruder into others' working lives. However, having worked in the voluntary sector, I was used to this role to some extent, and there are advantages to not being a prison or healthcare staff member when it comes to carrying out research interviews.

I decided early on in the process that as I wanted the mothers' voices to be strongly heard in the research, as described in **Section 5.3.2**, I wanted to use narrative interviews in order to gain rich information on women's experiences. It would also need to be a reflexive process, as described in **Section 5.6.5**. Early decisions centred on specifically how and where I could collect data to answer my research questions. I had established that I wanted the research to centre predominantly on mothers' voices, and I was aware that I would need approval from HMPPS (Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service) to access women on probation or in custody. Following advice, I therefore decided, to contact via email four prison establishments and a Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) in advance of an application being made to the HMPPS National Research Council (NRC), to see if there was any interest in my proposed research. In terms of the female prison estate, this resulted in: one negative response; one establishment that was unable to agree to research because the governor had been indefinitely suspended; one non-responder and one 'possible'. The only significant positive response came from the CRC, who immediately set up a conference call for me with two senior managers to discuss the proposed research. I also had an initial meeting with a voluntary organisation working with prisoners' families, to discuss their potential involvement in the study.

At this point, I was still keen to access a cohort of women in prison in addition to those in the community and therefore made an application to HMPPS NRC in order to make a request for access. HMPPS NRC approval is required for "all researchers wanting to conduct research with staff and/or offenders in prison establishments, National Probation Service (NPS)/Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRC) regions or within Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Services (HMPPS)" (HMPPS National Research Committee, 2021). This initial application was refused on several grounds, including

that there was other ongoing research in a similar topic area, as well as resource implications and questions regarding the methodology. I was entitled to make one further application in order to gain access by this route. Meanwhile, I also completed my application to the University of Northumbria ethics board, which was approved in August 2018.

Having considered the sensitivity of the topic I was researching and how best to go about collecting data and answering my research questions, I identified a number of potential advantages to accessing women in a community setting, rather than in custody, as detailed below:

- Higher chance of getting approval.
- Fewer ethical concerns for participants– less traumatic for women, less risk of coercion.
- Participants may be freer to speak with me and better able to reflect on their experiences.
- Data collected may be richer due to the above.
- Fewer constraints on interview questions.
- More control over selection of interview participants.
- More support available post-interviews.
- Ability to digitally record interviews, with participant permission.

The main potential disadvantage identified of interviewing mothers in the community setting was that they would be reflecting on past experiences, so it is possible that some reflections on the feelings experienced within custody would be lost. However, the counterpoint to this was that they would potentially be better able to reflect on their experience of custody as a whole, including their post-prison experiences. Due to the points outlined above, in addition to time and cost constraints, I decided it would be both more ethical and more relevant to focus the research on women in the community, and I submitted an application to HMPPS requesting access to women on probation via the CRC. Although I felt it may have benefited the research to access some women in prison I felt that it was too big a risk to the rest of the study to include this in the application and thus jeopardise the whole research process. In addition, the risk of causing further trauma to women in prison, who are separated from their children and have little means of support, was too large to outweigh any possible benefits to the research as a whole. The revised application to HMPPS was approved in March 2019 (see **Appendix 1**), and following this I began to think about contacting key gatekeepers

in relevant organisations who would be able to assist with access to interview participants (Wincup, 2017).

5.4.2 The research setting

The setting for the research covered both urban and rural areas and was chosen partly due to this geographical variation, as well as proximity to my place of study and the interest expressed in the research by relevant agencies. Due to time and cost constraints, I did not want to travel too far from my local area as this would make data collection very difficult. The Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) in question was approached, because it was the main provider in the area, although there are other providers bordering it which could have been chosen. In addition, the CRC had key managerial staff who were supportive of research in general and had an interest in the needs of criminalised women.

This meant that I had support when making formal applications for approval via the HMPPS National Research Council. I decided not to include National Probation Service (NPS) clients and services in my application, as the numbers were likely to be few and it would have involved liaising with another agency and group of staff to negotiate access and approvals. I also had professional relationships with some of the staff from my previous work role and knew that the CRC covered a large area, including both urban and rural areas and worked with one women's prison.

As part of the offer provided by the CRC, they work closely with a national voluntary organisation which provides 'Through the Gate' support and delivers 'women's hubs' for women on probation in addition to other projects such as the women's specific conditional caution scheme. 19% of the service user cohort at the CRC is female, equating to approximately 720 women (HMI Probation, 2020). Just 4% of service users – less than one in 20 - come from a Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background with the majority identifying as White British; this is far higher than the national average (HMI Probation, 2020). The caseload consists of women on community orders, women released on licence and those about to come out of prison.

5.4.3 Immersion in the field

Having finalised approvals and the research design I set about familiarising myself more closely with the issues concerning women involved in the criminal justice system, and particularly mothers. As I had worked previously within the women's sector, primarily within mental health and domestic abuse services, I had some prior knowledge of the issues facing women, although not of the specific needs of women

involved in the criminal justice system. I had also previously supported the local women's hub for women serving probation since its inception in 2014 which was coordinated by a voluntary organisation and commissioned by the CRC and was located with my then employer. This organisation was chosen as the weekly premises for the hub and I was employed on a part-time basis to support the group from a mental health viewpoint. Despite this prior experience, as part of the research process I felt that I needed to widen this experience to include women in a custodial setting and wider family work.

The first request I made was to restart my role within the women's hub on a voluntary basis, so I began attending the hub in September 2018 on a fortnightly basis. This had a twofold purpose. It allowed me to re-engage with relevant staff, see at first-hand the issues service users were facing, and re-acquaint myself with those issues. It also gave me a potential gateway into the organisations involved. Women's hubs operate in seven areas of the CRC, creating nine hubs in total due to requirements in some areas for additional capacity. Not all women on a probation order will attend the hubs, although they are all encouraged to do so in preference to attending CRC offices. The hubs run once each week for two hours and women may be required to attend either weekly, fortnightly or monthly depending on their order. The hubs are coordinated by a voluntary organisation which has a team of staff who deliver the hubs in each area. These staff are responsible for meeting and introducing women to the group, planning the timetable, monitoring attendance and referrals, and providing support to women. The hubs are run from women's centres, community centres and other venues, depending on what is available locally. They are all close to urban centres and public transport links for ease of attendance.

Each week a different activity or external agency will make up the main part of the session. For instance, sessions may be run on sexual health, dental care, housing, energy saving, drugs and alcohol, mental health, loan sharks and so on. Women are asked at regular intervals what they would like to see at the hubs and what help they feel they need. There is also time during breaks for women to get one-to-one support from hub staff, probation staff or other projects that meet people individually at the hubs. National Probation Service (NPS) clients can also be asked to attend the hubs[1], so there may also be NPS officers meeting women on a one-to-one basis. CRC staff

[1] At the time the research was completed medium and low risk offenders were assigned to CRCs and those assessed as higher risk to NPS. This changed in June 2021 with the creation of a new combined national probation service.

also attend the hubs to monitor attendance, reimburse travel fares, and meet with individual women on their caseloads as necessary. The hubs therefore provide a safe, women-only space away from probation offices for women to receive support from staff, peers and outside organisations.

Secondly, I revisited my contacts at a local charity who work with families of prisoners, with the potential for carrying out some voluntary work within their organisation. I attended a volunteer recruitment day but found that many of the roles on offer would require a greater time commitment than I could currently give, bearing in mind my PhD and family commitments. However, after speaking to a manager I was already acquainted with, it was suggested I could assist with the delivery of the 'Hidden Sentence' training programme. Hidden Sentence training is aimed at professionals and volunteers who work with offenders and their families; it gives an overview of the offender's journey through the criminal justice system, and the impact it can have on families. This was ideal, as the subject matter was directly relevant to my research and the training was delivered on an 'as and when' basis, so I was more easily able to fit it into other responsibilities. Again, this gave me an opportunity to speak with people directly working in the area and find out about pressing issues for people carrying out face-to-face work.

Thirdly, I saw an advertisement via a national charity which was looking to recruit volunteer workers to assist with a new group for pregnant and postnatal women in prison. I was successful in gaining this role and have thus been supporting the project since January 2018 as a prison visitor. This gave me valuable insight into the prison environment, the local context, and also the particular issues facing pregnant or post-natal women in prison. All of these roles allowed me to contribute to the groups I was working and researching with and to continue some face-to-face work in order to keep my academic work grounded in the real world. As a practitioner, this was extremely important to me and kept the reasons why I was doing the research to the front of my mind, which was also a factor in remaining motivated. In addition, these voluntary roles served to act as informal checks that the data I was collecting had validity. In addition to these roles, I attended as many forums, networking meetings and other events relevant to the subject area as I could. All of these events and opportunities pieced together different bits of important information that all added to the research process.

5.5 Ethical considerations

5.5.1 Researcher & participant safety

Although I am experienced in working with vulnerable women, particularly those with mental health needs and histories of violence and abuse, the role of researcher was new to me. I was more accustomed to dealing with people when they had come voluntarily for support, rather than a situation where I was asking them questions which were not necessarily in a helping capacity. As previously described, I was also working as a prison visitor with a charity and I therefore had current experience of working with vulnerable women in a prison environment; this made me better able to understand some of the language that is used within the custodial estate and also gave me an awareness of the environment the women had been held in and the issues they may have faced, as this work was ongoing through the second year of my research. As I was working across different agencies and areas, I needed to build relationships with staff working with different priorities and ways of working. Working across different sites, I was careful to familiarise myself with each location and inform staff of my whereabouts and activities. Where possible, I aimed to only carry out two interviews per day at the most, as this fitted into the hub timings (they run for two hours) and ensured space to deal with and reflect on the interview data, offer support if needed and upload and delete recordings.

Each interview followed a set procedure, which consisted of a series of measures ensuring that respondents were treated fairly and ethically. This involved informing participants of the aims of the research, how their data would be handled, how their anonymity would be ensured and when confidentiality would be broken. Respondents were also informed that participation was voluntary, that they did not have to answer all of the questions, they could stop the interview at any time, and they could also take a break as required. Women who were identified as particularly vulnerable by staff were not selected to take part. In some cases, if a women turned up on the day in a state of distress or under the influence of drugs or alcohol, either me or a member of staff would agree that the interview would be rearranged. If a woman was obviously emotionally unwell, I did not approach her to take part, and if an individual visibly/audibly made me aware that they did not want to take part whilst I was informing the group about the research, I respected their wishes and did not approach them further. All interviews were carried out either at CRC offices, within women's hubs, within my previous employer's premises (a women's charity and hub site) or, in one case, on the telephone whilst on site. In this way both my own safety and that of the respondents was protected, and there were opportunities for time out, refreshments and staff support. Staff were aware of who I was interviewing and when and, in many cases, had an informal check-in with the respondent afterwards.

The women's experiences of prison and probation meant that they were a potentially vulnerable group. Although I would not want to say that they were all vulnerable per se, particularly for those who had recently been released from custody, they were certainly in a state of flux, producing conflicted emotions, often characterised by stress and anxiety. By the nature of their being 'the researched' they were certainly in a position of reduced power and agency, so I had to be careful to ensure their awareness and understanding of the research process and informed consent (Woodiwiss, 2017). There was a risk that women might feel pressurised into participating if they felt that probation staff, hub staff, or myself as the researcher suggested they should. I would certainly say that the staff were to some extent protective of the participants and their needs, due to having good knowledge of them. I was also careful to check before the start of each interview that the participant was happy to go ahead and that they fully understood what was being asked of them.

There was a possibility of emotional distress arising for participants due to their situations and the nature of the issues being discussed, which was outlined in my ethics application for the research. On two occasions participants became actively distressed during the interview. On both occasions I offered to stop the interview and/or take a break, but in both cases I was assured that they 'always cried' when talking about the topic in question and that they were okay to continue; however, I did then try to steer the interview towards a less difficult topic, for example, asking a factual question or moving the interview on to a slightly less weighty topic. There were other occasions when I could sense that an issue was particularly difficult, and I would therefore tread very carefully, and again move the interview on if I felt that a respondent did not want to elaborate. At no point did I feel that I needed to inform a member of staff of any concerns whilst interviewing, although it was important that that avenue was there. Additionally, I was often able to re-join the main group with the participant and keep an eye on their wellbeing post-interview. I did at times offer support during the interviews around practical and safety issues, although this was generally to remind them of the support they could access via the hubs and probation and encouraging them to use this. One participant was reminded that if anything changed with respect to her current relationship and she felt in danger from an escalation of domestic abuse, then she should contact the police.

Participants were informed before the start of the interviews that there may be circumstances in which confidentiality would be broken. This would occur if I was made aware of something regarding risks to themselves or another person (child or adult). Recordings of interviews were deleted from the electronic recording device and

transferred as quickly as possible onto secure University computer systems (usually within 48 hours). The only place where a respondent's name appeared was on the consent forms which were kept separately from other data. Time was built into the end of the interview to check that the participant was okay and to answer any questions they may have had. The end of the interviews moved towards thinking about plans for the future and an affirmation that the progress they were making was good; most respondents had very clear plans going forward which was good to hear. In advance of the interviews, I refreshed my knowledge regarding what support was available to women in the area, - for example local women's organisations, mental health and domestic abuse support and counselling services, - although, as I was working across a fairly wide geographical area, in general if this had been needed it would have been more appropriate to speak to staff in those areas.

At the outset and from my prior experience with women, I had hoped that, although the area being researched was difficult, participation in the research process would give women a chance to tell their stories and voice their concerns about their situation, which may be a helpful and empowering experience for them. In general, I did find this to be case, many women were grateful for one-on-one time and a listening ear. In general, society can expect women to be the ones listening and supporting and this is something that women do not get always get in return. A number of women thanked me afterwards for listening to them and 'letting them get things off their chest'. That is not to say that all of those interviewed felt this way, and I fully appreciated the enormity of discussing such difficult and life-changing issues with someone they did not know very well. I can only assume that those who were more guarded would have different reflections on this that they did not feel able to disclose.

5.5.2 Participation and consent

To ensure that consent was fully informed and freely given a participant information sheet was produced (see **Appendix 5**) to inform participants of the purpose of the research and what would be required of them. For those interviews occurring at CRC offices, these were sent out to staff, to go through with respondents before they agreed to be interviewed. For those recruited via women's hubs, I went through them verbally with the participant before the interview.

Written consent forms (see **Appendix 6**) were provided to participants before the interviews commenced. These were explained in full verbally to participants, who then signed a copy for the researcher to retain. Both information sheets and consent forms were written using clear and accessible language to ensure understanding among all

participants, including those with low literacy levels. Participation in the research was entirely voluntary and there was no payment made or incentive offered at any point. It was made clear to all participants that they could withdraw from the research and have their data removed up to two months following the interview. They were also informed that taking part (or not) in the study would not affect their probation order in any way.

Consent was not seen as a one-off static event but rather as a continuous process that needed to be considered and revisited at all stages of the research (Wincup, 2017). Participants were told that they could give as much or as little information as they wish and that they did not have to answer every question. I also kept a reflective research journal which detailed any difficult events that arose, allowing reflection on this and the progress of the research as a whole.

5.6 Data collection

5.6.1 Practitioner interviews

After meeting with the CRC, I was provided with a list of their staff who I could approach to interview, in addition to staff working at the women's hubs. This included women's champions in each area and other staff who worked specifically with female service users. Information was sent out to them explaining the purpose of the research and requesting participation in an interview. In this respect the sample of staff was partially self-selecting after the target group of staff had been identified. In some cases, follow up phone calls were required where respondents had limited email access, this secured a number of interviews where people had initially failed to respond. I carried out the first interviews at the end of May 2019 and completed this process by the end of July, having spoken to ten staff in total including three hub staff, two from a voluntary organisation providing family support, and five probation (CRC) workers. This process had a twofold purpose: firstly, to gain further information about the issues facing mothers who have been in prison and their families; and, secondly to introduce myself to staff in the field and gain trust and contacts for the next stage of the fieldwork. These interviews provided an element of methodological triangulation, enabling me to check the validity of the research findings, in addition to the interviews with mothers and my participation in the women's hubs and other immersion activities (Punch, 2005).

The first two interviews with staff were used to pilot the interview schedule and recruitment methods in order to make changes as needed. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 90 minutes and were carried out at the respondent's place of work. An interview schedule (see **Appendix 7**) was loosely followed with the opportunity for participants to focus more on areas relevant to them as necessary. Most staff seemed

to enjoy the chance to talk about their work and the issues facing them and the women they worked with. This process highlighted some issues that I had not envisaged, and also placed more emphasis on some which I had not previously thought held such importance. Interviews were digitally recorded, and handwritten notes were also made as needed. Transcription began fairly quickly after the interviews took place in order to shape the next stage of the fieldwork. Some respondents also gave me suggestions regarding other people I might want to speak with. At the end of the interviews, I explained that the next phase of the research would involve speaking to mothers with experience of custody; most interviewees gave me an indication of whether they had anyone on their caseload who fit the criteria and might be willing to speak with me.

5.6.2 Interviews with mothers

Due to the nature and circumstances of the research and the respondents, I adopted a purposive sampling approach, again with an element of self-selection, particularly with regards to those women attending the women's hub. This enabled me to access as many respondents that fitted the research criteria as I was able within the time available. The constraints were as follows:

1. Access was approved to contact probation clients within the specific CRC only (no access was granted to NPS clients).

2. There was opportunity to access other clients who were working with the voluntary organisation or not on probation, as long as they were not NPS clients.

3. The timescale for access was March 2019-March 2020.

Within these constraints, I had two main methods and one subsidiary method for accessing respondents:

1. Directly **via probation staff** working with individuals (in which case interviews were generally carried out at CRC offices). Not all women on probation attend the hubs depending on their other commitments, offending history and risk level.

2. **Via Women's hubs** in the seven areas of the CRC, either through self-identification, my identification, or CRC and hub staff's identification.

3. **Via other organisations**: the service user council, other voluntary organisation projects, Through the Gate staff (these avenues only produced one eligible respondent).

Service user interviews began in July 2019 and were completed by December, so were carried out over a period of approximately six months. Pilot interviews were carried out via two recruitment methods: directly through probation officers, and via women's' hubs in order to test the two methods of recruitment. Initially I followed up with any probation officers who had told me at interview they had eligible service users on their caseloads who were potentially willing to take part. The first pilot interview was carried out via a probation officer who had contacted the woman involved and arranged for her to be interviewed at the CRC offices. An additional pilot interview was carried out at the women's hub as outlined below.

Following this, participants were recruited in one of two ways: either directly through probation officers who were already working with the women, in which case the officer approached the woman in question, told them about the research, and then arranged a time for the interview, in conjunction with me or they were recruited directly from the women's hubs in the seven areas of operation. Information was sent out to staff within the CRC specifically who were specifically working with women, and the following criteria were used to select potential participants:

- They identified as a 'mother' (whether or not the children were in their care, they had grown up children, or they were also grandmothers).
- They had experienced at least one period of imprisonment.
- They were not currently experiencing emotional distress/acute mental ill-health.
- They understood and were willing to take part in the research.

Table 5.1: Recruitment of respondents:

Via probation officer at offices	Via probation officer at hubs	Via vol. org. hub staff	Via attending hubs (researcher recruited)
3	6	2	9

During the first weeks of September 2019, I visited all of the nine women's hubs in operation, to tell women about the research and its purpose, and to identify women who may be willing to participate. I also gave out some flyers with basic information about the research (see **Appendix 2**) and approached other staff attending the hubs. Women were spoken to as a group, as staff were not necessarily aware which women either had children or had been in prison. Additionally, new women arrive at the hubs

every week and they are not a static group due to new arrivals, leavers and some women being on monthly, weekly or fortnightly attendance monitoring.

There were some issues that quickly became apparent when speaking to women in groups; primarily it felt inappropriate to ask them to disclose information about their custodial sentence to the whole group. Instead, I encouraged women to speak with me in the break or to another member of staff in order to avoid this, because obviously not everyone wants to disclose a prior prison sentence to the group. A couple of women came forward directly after being told about the research in a group setting, but in general this turned out to be not the best way to encourage participation. In some cases, whilst another organisation was delivering a session, I would become aware that someone attending was a mother who had experienced custody and I could then approach them in the break and either interview them there and then or arrange to meet the following week. In other cases, hub workers knew that women may have had relevant experiences and I then approached them individually. In some instances, probation staff would let me know of possible participants on their caseload and then I could approach them directly in the hubs when they attended.

Initially the response rate was rather slow, but on revisiting the hubs I began to get more interest and I managed to complete eight interviews in the space of one week. I revisited many hubs a number of times to maintain my profile, speak to CRC staff and hub staff and involve myself with sessions; often when working with women in sessions, it would transpire that they fitted the research criteria, and I could then ask if they would be willing to be interviewed. There were sometimes issues with finding a suitable space to work in, as each hub is on a different site, so I had to be flexible to the needs of other workers carrying out individual appointments and the requirements and timings of the sessions. In addition, some of the respondents had time constraints, for instance, if they had children to collect or appointments to attend. Hub staff or probation staff were told if I was taking someone to another room to be interviewed in order that they knew our whereabouts on site. After speaking with one woman who indicated she would be interviewed, it transpired that she had not been in prison but wanted assistance to get back in contact with her children. She was included in the sample as many of the issues she raised were relevant to the research. A number of the women interviewed were extremely grateful for the chance to speak with me and were thankful for the opportunity.

After the initial interviews at the hubs were completed, the numbers tailed off as I had managed to catch most of the initial participants who fitted the criteria and people

began to get used to seeing me around. I then became a little concerned that I would not reach the number of interviews I felt I needed to get a good picture of the women's experiences. During this time, I continued to visit as many hubs as I could and take an active part in the sessions: this was part of my immersive approach and it often gave rise to interesting issues, many of which centred on abusive relationships and mental health. I also had conversations with women who were interested in my studies and were hopeful of returning to education themselves, and so was able to offer advice and encouragement with this. I wanted to complete this period of fieldwork by the Christmas holidays as this would provide a clear cut-off point to the process; it had also been informally agreed as the point I would cease interviewing. I completed a total of 20 interviews by the last week before Christmas and decided that this was a suitable time to cease attending hubs and seeking out further interviews. By this point I found different variations on the same themes were presenting, indicating I had reached saturation point (Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006). During the period of fieldwork, I had regular meetings with staff at the CRC and voluntary organisation to discuss issues and the progress of the research. I also kept a reflexive fieldwork diary detailing my experiences, both of interviewing and attendance at the hubs, as well as additional voluntary work I was attending.

5.6.3 The experience of interviewing

Using narrative qualitative interviews, I was able to collect women's accounts of their experiences of the prison system and the effect that this had on them and their families. I described my research activity as, "*collecting stories about people's experiences*" to women, explaining that I was talking to women across the local area about what had happened to them. As the opening question, in all cases was, "*Can you tell me about what happened when you went to prison?*" (see Interview Guide, **Appendix 8**) this approach created what can be termed a "narrative" account of these experiences (Riessman, 1993). As this was a qualitative, narrative study, it was important to me as a researcher that the overarching stories of the women's experiences were not lost. This meant there was a certain amount of freedom given to the interviewees in terms of what they chose to talk about in the time available. In this way respondents were free to talk about the parts most important to them, rather than to me. There was a risk during interviews on this topic that I could 're-traumatize' them by encouraging discussion about difficult experiences. However, talking about difficult experiences can also be cathartic and assist with our understanding and acceptance of them. It can be seen from the interview transcripts that some of the respondents voiced

very long narratives about their experiences, while others gave much shorter answers and required more prompts to elicit information (Riessman, 1993; Woodiwiss, 2017).

I had initially intended to use ecomaps (Hartman, 1979) as an additional data collection tool in case of lower literacy levels and to engage participants in the interview process. However, the initial pilot interview required very little interviewer input as the participant had a great deal to say, and the interview only ended due to the offices closing for lunch. Although an ecomap was produced it did not form a key part of the interview and I made the decision not to use this tool, unless I encountered particular problems engaging with respondents. I was relieved that participants seemed keen to talk about their experiences, as I had been repeatedly warned in the staff interviews that service users were tired of repeating their stories to professionals over and over again. There was also the question of whether this disclosure would be re-traumatizing, which was a particular concern; a staff member had reported a female service user describing how repeating your experiences to staff was like, "*you're scratching a scab and then you're leaving us to bleed*". I therefore allowed the interviewees to guide the interview themselves as far as possible, in order that they were in control of what they disclosed and able to talk on their terms about the issues most pertinent to them.

Interviews varied in length from 15 minutes to 90 minutes. This was dependent on how much respondents had to say and, in some cases, how much time they had. Some of the women had other appointments to get to or children to collect, which made the interviews rather shorter than anticipated. In other cases, women just wanted to get some key issues across, and some had difficulty sitting and engaging for any extended length of time due to their mental state. In most cases, interviews could be termed semi-structured, although in some cases they were relatively unstructured, depending on how much prompting was required. I always began with a very open question in order to elicit narrative - "*can you tell me a bit about what happened when you went to prison?*" - and then followed up with additional prompts or questions dependent on what they said in response to this. The majority of the interviews were digitally recorded, apart from two where the women requested not to be recorded. Another interview had to be unexpectedly carried out over the telephone, and it was not possible to record this one either.

The retention of personal data was kept to a minimum in order to protect respondents' anonymity and build trust in the research process. In some cases, answers were very succinct with little elaboration, whereas other women talked for longer periods. On reflection, some of the reasons for this included the rapport between myself and the

respondent: the setting; whether people had other places to be; how comfortable they were talking about the issue; and how much they trusted in revealing these experiences to me. Some participants were harbouring a lot of stigma either about the offence, the effect of their offending on others or just generally (some had been front page news) and in some cases there were things they were careful not to reveal (e.g. past trauma, offending). Respondents' mental health on the day of interview was also a factor - some women were obviously dealing with depression and anxiety, amongst other things and also addiction in some cases. Another factor may have been how recent the events were: it was often observed that the ones who had been in custody further in the past actually had more to say.

The fact that interviews took place during probation sessions may have had an effect on women's ability to feel at ease, in addition to how well they knew me; some would have seen me at hubs for a number of weeks, but others may have been monthly or new attenders. Their past experiences of talking about these issues may also have been a factor. Those who had been vilified by the press were more reluctant to engage. Their relationship with staff was another aspect. If they had a good relationship with their probation officer or hub staff who had indicated I was safe to speak with, then they were probably more likely to become involved. Their level of understanding of what research is and involves may have been a factor: it seemed that those who had more knowledge, a higher level of education, or a more highly regarded work role were warier and if they agreed to take part were more likely to refuse to be recorded. Those who were more articulate seemed to perhaps have more of a point to make about what had happened to them.

5.6.4 Whose voices?

As with any research, the women that came forward to take part in the study were, to some extent, those who were engaging with services and were at the less 'chaotic' end of the spectrum of women involved in the criminal justice system. Because of the recruitment approach, the women needed to be either engaging with a probation officer or attending the women's hubs in order for me to access them to participate. Many of the women I interviewed were first-time offenders rather than those who were more entrenched in the criminal justice system. Those women who may have been quieter, less forthcoming, or harbouring more guilt, shame or stigma about their sentence would be less likely to come forward to take part. In one case, I was made aware that a potential respondent was reluctant to take part as she had previously been featured in a double page spread of 'Criminal Women' in a local newspaper, which had obviously had a significant negative impact on her mental health. To try to overcome these

effects, I spent substantial time within the women's hubs, to enable people to get to know me, and also utilised links with staff with whom women were familiar and had good relationships already. It could be that the interview situation, might change what they said and how they told their stories; for instance, they may have been affected by my role, appearance, accent etc., and there was always the danger that they were telling a narrative that they thought I wanted to hear. As Riessman (1993, p. 8) states, "We cannot give voice – we do hear voices that we record and interpret.".

The nature of the research area meant working within a space where there were, in many cases, blurred boundaries between victim and offender. Conversely, there was also a danger of viewing respondents as victims, and therefore removing any agency from their lives. Many of these women had come through extremely difficult experiences and were in many ways very strong; they therefore would not have thanked me for portraying them as helpless victims of situations and systems. There was one particular occasion when I had carried out two interviews consecutively that had involved particularly harrowing narratives; afterwards I felt a mixture of anger and frustration, and felt somewhat overwhelmed, but I also felt that to indulge these feelings was not fair on the strong women who had come out of the other side of these experiences, when I had only listened to them. In general, I managed the emotional effects of listening to sometimes difficult narratives by ensuring I completed only one or two interviews per day and that I also engaged in other activities during my working week.

I often had the feeling that I was being intrusive into people's personal experiences; this is, to some extent, the nature of research, but not necessarily something that I was personally used to. Having previously worked in an organisation where people voluntarily attended to get help, I thus had to navigate a research environment where I was asking people to engage with me by discussing very sensitive issues and experiences, for limited reward. On the other hand, on a number of occasions, women thanked me for listening to their experiences, and in some cases I was able to refer respondents onto professionals who may be able to help them or remind them who they could contact for help in specific situations. I also offered encouragement in terms of their ability to cope with the situations they found themselves in, as well as reassurance to those recently released from custody that it was not unusual to find this period as extremely challenging and confusing.

I found that in some cases, women I interviewed who had just come out of prison, had less to say than those for whom the experience had been further in the past. Women

who had recently come out were perhaps less able to reflect on the experience and the effect it had had on themselves and their children, as they were essentially still going through it. This was in part surprising, but also justifies my decision to interview women in the community, after they had served their sentence, rather than whilst they were experiencing it. I also had to be aware of the impact of my own position within the interview process and ensure it did not cause me to hear some things and disregard others.

5.6.5 My position in the research process

As a feminist researcher working in a sensitive area, it is imperative that I consider and reflect on my own position within the research process, as Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) recommend. Although I shared some similarities with respondents, there were many more differences. The overwhelming majority of respondents were White British, many of them were a similar age to me and, like me, they were all female and mothers. However, I was in a potential position of power and was an outsider within the interview process, as I did not share the mothers' experiences of having been in custody. It would be immediately obvious to them that I was from a different part of the country to the majority of them, although I have lived in the North East for 18 years. My level of education was rather different from that of most of the respondents and the fact that I was carrying out research based in a University setting, influenced the balance of power.

I do not wish to, and cannot, claim that I held any special ability to develop rapport with the respondents who, on the whole had significantly different life experiences to me. As the researcher and not the researched, I was in the position of power and therefore had to bear this in mind, in terms of how it would affect people's responses to me (Mason and Stubbs, 2010). I had not been in prison or on probation or involved with the criminal justice system in any way and more significantly, had never been forcefully separated from my own children. I had a certain level of understanding of their situations due to prior work experience and my activities attempting to immerse myself in the context of female offending, but this was always as an outsider.

During the interview process, my own experiences as a mother brought certain emotions to the fore. For instance, when a mother recounted not being able to collect her child from school due to her sudden imprisonment, this reminded me of my own son's distress when a friend forgot to collect him and he was left waiting. My son still talks about this incident many years on, which enabled me to reflect on how impactful even relatively minor parental absences can be for children. My only other experiences

of being separated from my children were generally related to healthcare experiences. My older son had severe eczema as a baby and at one point I was told he may need to be admitted to hospital at some distance from home to receive treatment, if his skin condition further deteriorated. I remember at the time feeling both angry and somewhat helpless at this veiled threat and suggestion that as his mother, I was not doing enough – again although in no way comparable to what the mothers in the study experienced they gave me some insights into the emotions that can arise. Whilst analysing the data, these experiences as a mother allowed me to reflect on the strength of the physical and emotional bonds that tie mothers and their children together and give insight into the distress that is caused by enforced separation, even for short periods.

As I had built relationships with staff from both voluntary organisations and the CRC some of whom I knew through a previous work role, it was possible that I could have been viewed as being on the side of the agencies involved. This 'insider status' however also meant that there was a certain level of trust due to existing relationships with some of the practitioners interviewed and knowledge of the different working cultures and priorities of the agencies involved. It also enabled me to more quickly slot into and assume a role within the hub sessions I attended and gain the trust of both staff I was unfamiliar with, and women attending the sessions. As Chavez (2008) suggests, these advantages included making access easier and establishing a 'rapport' quicker. It also meant that I would potentially have additional understanding of the role of the practitioners I interviewed and have existing knowledge that meant less clarification was needed of, for instance, terminology and working practices. However, on the other hand, this could have led to assumptions being made, so I also had to be aware of the potential impact of this prior knowledge.

All of the above will have influenced my research approach, research questions and how I went about collecting data. As Mishler (1991) describes, interviews are jointly constructed by both interviewer and respondent. These differences therefore had to be kept in mind at every stage of the research process, including when making decisions about interviews, data analysis and interpretation of the research findings.

5.7 Analysis

5.7.1 Analysis of practitioner interviews

Data analysis began with the practitioner interviews (10 in total), which were carried out prior to the interviews with mothers. These interviews were transcribed as soon as possible after taking place. Transcription for all interviews was carried out by me, and this was also the first stage of data analysis, as it enabled me to become more familiar

with the data. Transcription of staff interviews was carried out in full but pauses and non-lexical expressions were not generally included, unless deemed to be significant. Codes were then produced for each transcript and combined where relevant to produce themes. The next stage involved the creation of a mind map of the major themes identified by staff in the interviews that were important for mothers who had been in custody (see **Appendix 10**). These themes, then informed the interview guide created for the interviews with mothers (see **Appendix 8**) allowing me to identify whether there were any major areas I had overlooked or underemphasised. The staff interview data would also serve as a check on the validity of the data from women – supporting what they had said, and also in some cases providing a policy viewpoint or practice understanding of the issue and enriching the data and the understanding of it.

Staff interview data was then analysed using NVIVO qualitative data analysis software. This was helpful in identifying and combining themes that came from the staff interview data. As these interviews were not stories or narratives as such, I felt it was appropriate to use a different technique for analysis to that used for the women's accounts. Staff interviews were generally more structured and followed a particular format. The themes identified from the staff interviews gave additional data to add to what the women were saying and enabled deeper understanding of the issues identified. The process of analysing the mothers' narratives is outlined below.

5.7.2 Analysis of interviews with mothers

Interview data was analysed using a predominantly narrative approach, based on Riessman (1993) and influenced by Woodiwiss, Smith and Lockwood (2017). This approach was used in order to preserve as far as possible the women's stories, as opposed to taking sections out of the context of their narratives. The research topic, approach, and format of the interviews led themselves to this method, due to its emphasis on women's lives and stories, particularly those concerning difficult or traumatic experiences (Woodiwiss, Smith and Lockwood, 2017).

In the main, my analysis of the interview data was focused on *what* women said about their experiences and their feelings within that, -on content rather than form-, although I did also pay attention to *how* they told their stories, and took influence from Woodiwiss, Smith and Lockwood (2017), who suggest the researcher should look at, what is absent or missing, in addition to what respondents are saying. In particular, I considered what impression the women were trying to give as they told their story: was it a narrative of coping and hope, of being a victim or of being a good mother, and why

were they telling it in that way? How power and gender influenced their narrative was also important to my analysis. I also considered the following questions:

- How do they start their stories?
- What are they trying to say?
- Which words do they use repeatedly and why?

Herman-Lewis (1992b) suggests that people may have gaps in their memory and therefore their stories due to trauma, so I also looked out for evidence of this. At the same time, I kept in mind my role within the process and how the interview itself is a co-production, as described by Mishler (1991).

Data was analysed using thematic narrative analysis approaches. This was done in order to avoid removing interview quotes completely from the women's narratives and thus viewing them in isolation. To achieve this, the following process was followed:

1. I transcribed the interviews in full. This was an important process in understanding the narratives, the language used, the overall stories and ways of understanding their experiences. This commenced whilst data collection was still ongoing in order to preserve understanding of the interviews.
2. Mind maps of the major themes and findings were produced to get a feel for the data and the commonalities within the women's stories (see **Appendix 11**).
3. Brief pen portraits were produced for each of the women interviewed summarising their situation of going to custody, biographical information and major issues encountered.
4. I read and reread the transcripts multiple times to fully understand the narratives and the stories within them.
5. Basic quantitative data was extracted from the transcripts regarding offence type, issues experienced, number of children, where children resided, additional issues etc. (see **Appendix 9).**
6. Transcripts were revisited to check for any omissions in the above.
7. A list of codes was produced for each transcript.
8. Codes were combined into themes where appropriate.
9. Transcripts were revisited.
10. Codes were loosely categorised according to whether they related to individual/family/community factors and at which stage of the prison journey: prior/during/post.

Once I had a better understanding of the narratives and the emerging themes I set about categorising and combining them into groups that would form the structure for presenting the data. A socio-ecological approach was used to examine data at the following levels (Belsky, 1980; Heise, 1998): personal history/individual; family (micro); community (exo); and macro factors (see **Chapter 4**). However, it must be noted these are not discrete categories as there was much interaction between the different factors and the individual's position within them.

5.7.3 Introducing the mothers

The findings of this research, presented in **Chapters 6**, **7** and **8,** are centred on the narratives of 20 mothers who took part in interviews. An outline of each of them is provided below; all names used are pseudonyms. Additionally, seven of the women's stories are outlined in more detail within the following chapters, as indicated below.

These brief pen portraits were composed in order to provide a sense of who the mothers were and highlight the key features of their narratives. This approach enabled, as Golsteijn and Wright (2013, p. 2) suggest, a means of interacting "holistically" with research data as their pen portraits or longer research portraits aim to provide. They are mostly descriptive, providing basic information on family and life circumstances. As Holloway and Jefferson (2000) state pen portraits can help to develop a sense of the participant as a person. These brief portraits are not comprehensive biographies but provide summary information relevant to the research aims. In developing these portraits, I summarised key information of mostly descriptive details that emerged from repeated readings of the transcripts.

19 of the women were mothers with experience of custody; one was a mother who was currently on probation but had not been in prison. They ranged in age from early twenties to over sixty years of age, with the majority being in their thirties and forties. Personal and demographic data was not routinely collected as part of the research, partly to protect anonymity and for data protection purposes; if the information was not directly relevant to the research study and was not essential to answering the research questions, then I did not want to collect surplus personal data as a matter of routine. However, many of the women disclosed their age during the interviews, as well as other personal information that was pertinent to their stories. The majority of the women were White British. This was anticipated, as the majority of the women attending the hubs in the area studied were White. Ethnicity data was not formally recorded due to the small numbers involved and the possibility of being able to identify the women concerned. As the research did not analyse the experiences of BAME

women in this instance, it must be acknowledged that the research cannot claim to encompass the experiences of BAME mothers and foreign nationals who have experienced a period of custody.

All of the women interviewed, apart from one, were currently on probation and were interviewed in the community. They were generally on probation either as a result of their custodial sentence - thereby they had been released under Home Detention Curfew (HDC) and were still on licence or under the new post custodial supervision in the community - or because they had committed a further offence since their period of custody. 15 of the women had recently been in custody (within the last 12 months) and five had experienced a period of custody at some point in the past (up to 20 years ago). Sentence length ranged from three weeks to five years with time served varying between three weeks and two years 11 months. They had between one and four children each, ranging from young babies up to the age of 21 years. Some of the children were not currently in their care. None of the mothers interviewed had been imprisoned due to a violent offence: six had committed fraud; three were drugs offences; three robbery/theft; two perverting the course of justice; two drink driving; one intimidation of a neighbour; one arson; and one affray.

1. **Lisa** (see **Case 5, Section 7.3.3**)

Lisa, a mother of one son, was in her 40s and being supervised by probation following an 18-month prison sentence for fraud and using false documents. She was convicted for fraud related to tenancies of properties she and her partner took on. Her son was now 18 and had been looked after by her mother while she was in prison. Lisa had been in a seven year relationship with her co-accused, who took his own life before the trial. Her relationship with her partner was abusive and controlling, and she had sustained severe physical injuries from his abuse.

2. **Kerry** (see **Case 4, Section 7.3.1**)

Kerry, a mother of three, was in her early 30's and was convicted of conspiracy to pervert the course of justice and producing cannabis. It was her first offence and she was sentenced to two years, 11 months. She had a 16 week old baby and two other children at the time of sentencing, and was interviewed while on probation. Her partner and co-accused was abusive towards her and was very controlling and threatening, she said that this was what led to the offence, as she was scared of him and his friends. Her mother looked after her children with help from her sister.

3. **Samantha** (see **Case 6, Section 8.2.1**)

Samantha was sentenced to 42 months for fraud through employment, and was the single parent of two sons aged 20 and 14. It was her first offence and she was under probation supervision at the time of interview. Her mum moved into the family home and took over her tenancy in order to look after her boys. Her relationship with her mother suffered immense strain due to the events surrounding her offence and prison sentence.

4. Sarah

Sarah had not been to prison. She was on probation and doing unpaid work for a drink-driving offence. She wanted some help with getting contact with her two children. She had recently come out of rehab for alcohol abuse and had not seen her children for four months as there was a court order in place for her not to have contact until she had got herself better. At the time of interview, she had no contact with her children, either in person or on the phone. She was not allowed to contact her ex-partner as she had been accused of assaulting him.

5. Andrea

Andrea had been sent to prison on remand in 1999 for three weeks, when her son was 18 months old. The offence was for supplying drugs, and she was given a suspended sentence. She said her family would not let her speak to or see her son after she was arrested. At the time of interview she was on probation for a different offence.

6. Tanya

Tanya, a mother of two, was in her early 40s and had received a 10-month sentence for taking drugs into prison for a family member. Her youngest son had been sent to live with his dad by social services when he was eight; he was currently 12 and had returned to her care around the time of the offence. Initially she was given a suspended sentence as she was the main carer for her son, but his father disputed this so her sentence was exorcised and she was given a 10 month custodial sentence.

7. Diane

Diane had committed a drink-driving offence while on holiday and was arrested and sent straight to prison. She had one daughter who was looked after by her sister under a special guardianship order. She went straight onto the detox wing in prison and ended up serving six weeks in custody. She was on probation at the time of interview.

8. Bianca

Bianca was in her early 30s and had initially received a suspended sentence but was then recalled to prison for stealing two bottles of wine. She had three children at the time and found out she was pregnant whilst in prison. Her mum already looked after

her children prior to prison due to her alcohol issues and so continued to care for them. She was currently on probation.

9. Angela (see **Case 1, Section 6.2.2**)

Angela's son was about a year old when she had set fire to her own house whilst hearing voices due to post-natal depression. She was then convicted of arson with intent and remanded in custody, receiving a 12-month sentence. Her son went to live with his dad and she did not see him again until he was 16 years old. She was currently on probation for recent offences.

10. Laura

Laura who was in her early 40s had been convicted 20 years previously for street robbery and served seven weeks of a three-month sentence. At the time she had a baby who was a few months old. She was initially in a general women's prison and then applied for a place in the MBU. She had social services involvement with her children prior to this and had grown up in care herself. At the time of interview, she had four children who were now grown up. She was currently on probation for new offences.

11. Cheryl (see **Case 2, Section 6.2.3**)

Cheryl's son was five when she went to prison. She had been charged with affray and been sentenced to three months. Her son was cared for by her mother during that time. By the time of interview she now had two girls who lived with her. Her son went to live with his dad when he was 11. She continues to have an issue with shoplifting, which was why she was currently on probation.

12. Danielle

Danielle, was in her 30s and a single parent of one daughter, aged 11 who was autistic. She had recently come out of prison and was now on licence. Her mother looked after her daughter while she was in prison. Danielle had been suffering from anxiety and panic attacks since coming out of prison. Danielle felt that her daughter was still withdrawn since she came out. She had received no benefits money as yet, three weeks after her release.

13. Stacey

Stacey was a chartered accountant and had misappropriated funds. Her daughter was 8 and a half months old when she went to prison. She was initially sent to a women's prison and then managed to get moved to an MBU. Her mother looked after her daughter initially, until she was able to stay with her at the MBU. Her relationship with

her mum deteriorated and her mum applied for a child arrangement order towards the end of her sentence, which was refused.

14. Linda

Linda's offence was taking money from her employer during a period when splitting up from her then husband and she received a six-month sentence. She had a daughter at the time who was eight years old. Her daughter was looked after by her parents in their home. This was her first and only offence and had occurred some 20 years previously.

15. Naomi

Naomi's offence was taking money from her employer, which resulted in her losing her job. Her sons were 18 and 21 at the time, she received a two-year sentence. She was currently on licence and had been on tag until recently. She said she felt some relief when her offence was found out as it allowed her to stop and deal with it all. Her family found it hard financially while she was in prison. She was currently applying for jobs and thinking about her future.

16. Janette

Janette explained that she had been involved in a dispute with her neighbour which had eventually led to her arrest and a six-week prison sentence. She did not feel that she had done anything to warrant her arrest. She was currently on probation but was unable to return to her home and had accumulated rent arrears. She was therefore homeless and her children were being looked after by their father, as she had nowhere for them to live. She had difficulty being released on tag as she had no suitable address to be released to.

17. Caitlin (see **Case 3, Section 7.2.2**)

Caitlin was 22 and had one daughter. She did not see her daughter while she was in prison. She had received a 20-month sentence for a drugs offence, along with her boyfriend who was co-accused and currently still in prison. Caitlin had mental health problems and had given up her daughter at four months old as she was not coping, she had signed over her care to the father's parents. She had come out on tag but found it really hard to cope and had then broken her licence conditions and been returned to prison. She was currently on probation.

18. Alison

Alison was in her mid-forties and had been sentenced for defrauding her employer. It had been quite a high-profile case which had been in the national press. Her sons were 18 and 20 when she went to prison, and went to live with their grandad. At the time of

interview, she had been out of prison for three months, but her sons were still living at their granddad's.

19. Tammy (see **Case 7, Section 8.4.1**)

Tammy had received a four-year sentence for a robbery offence and served two years in prison. She had been living on the streets at the time of the offence. She had two daughters aged 15 and 19. She described how her previous partner had been abusive towards her for a long time (14 years). Her daughters had ended up in care as a result of the domestic violence which was occurring at home. She was currently on probation.

20. Alicia

Alicia, aged 30, had been convicting of providing a false alibi for her partner and was currently on probation. She had one son who was four years old. It was her first offence and she served 13 weeks. Her son was looked after initially by his dad, and then by her mum. She did not tell her son where she was and so he did not come to visit her while she was in prison. She rang him and spoke to him every day.

5.7 Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodology used in the research study. This has included how early decisions were made and the process of gaining formal approvals to carry out the research. It has outlined the setting in which the research took place, and how participants were recruited to the study. It has also detailed my role within the research process, and my engagement in voluntary work as part of the research process.

Due to the nature of the research, there were a number of important considerations made regarding ethics, and researcher and participant safety. This included ensuring that the mothers who chose to take part in the research did so with fully informed consent, and that they were able to withdraw from the research at any point. The process of interviewing both practitioners and mothers has been outlined, including consideration of issues such as safeguarding. There has also been reflection of my role as researcher and how my background and experiences may have affected the research process.

The final sections detail how data was analysed and give justification for the decisions made and the strategies used. The chapter has also introduced the mothers who took part in the research, their stories will be presented in more detail over the next three chapters.

Chapter 6: Prior trauma in the lives of mothers who have experienced imprisonment

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents my findings from research regarding evidence of prior trauma in the lives of mothers who have experienced a period of imprisonment. As outlined in **Chapter 2**, previous research has suggested that up to 99% of women in prison may have experienced prior trauma of some kind (Green *et al.*, 2005; Cook *et al.*, 2005; Anderson, Pitner and Wooten, 2020; Bevan, 2017). This could be in the form of childhood sexual or physical abuse, witnessing violence in the home, intimate partner violence or sexual violence, for instance. Other research has described the role of trauma in people's lives through the concept of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (Mulcahy, 2018; Felitti *et al.*, 1998), which can be categorised as roughly similar or comparable to incidents of trauma except focusing specifically on occurrence during childhood; namely physical and emotional abuse, mental illness, domestic violence, and substance abuse within the household. Research has also looked at factors influencing women's pathways to prison, suggesting a relationship between previous abuse, mental health and substance misuse, and how this results in offending behaviour (McDaniels-Wilson and Belknap, 2008; DeHart *et al.*, 2014). Prior trauma as described in this chapter is presented as the first 'phase' of trauma experienced by mothers who have experience of custody. Anderson, Pitner and Wooten (2020) have referred to this as 'pre-incarceration trauma (PIT)'. This is followed by the trauma of prison itself (**Chapter 7**) and then the effect on their life after prison (**Chapter 8**). All names used to refer to respondents are pseudonyms as outlined in **Chapter 5**. The data is corroborated and extended by the practitioner interview data, which is presented alongside the women's voices. As described in **Chapter 5**, interviews with practitioners were carried out with probation officers and workers from two voluntary sector organisations working with women on probation.

Using a socio-ecological approach adapted from Belsky (1980) and Heise (1998) and informed by trauma theory (van der Kolk, 2005; Tseris, 2013; Burstow, 2003) as outlined in **Chapter 4**, data will be presented as corresponding to different nested levels of influence as outlined in this approach; individual, family, community and society. A broad definition of trauma is used (see **Chapter 4**) to encapsulate the range of experiences affecting peoples' lives with a particular emphasis on the role of intergenerational trauma (Menzies, 2010; Heberle, Obus and Gray, 2020). This definition has been shaped in response to the data collected, prior literature and my

practitioner experiences. The interview respondents themselves did not in most cases describe events as 'traumatising' or 'traumatic'. Therefore, my interpretation of the data, as researcher, becomes a key component of how and when trauma is defined.

Although not all women interviewed disclosed prior trauma, in the majority of cases they had experienced some kind of trigger or stressful event that impacted on their ability to cope with life around the time of the offence occurring. It is apparent that even though during interviews I did not prompt women directly about trauma or difficulties in their lives, the information that they went on to disclose contained evidence of this. That is not to say that this means the women should be viewed as victims or passive in their situation, they all displayed great courage and strength to deal with the difficult experiences they had endured. Five of the mothers disclosed having experienced domestic abuse, 14 had experienced mental health issues (two had made suicide attempts), nine had issues with drugs or alcohol and six had lost their homes during their involvement with the criminal justice system and three were or had been homeless. These issues will be discussed in more detail over the following chapter. The prior traumatic experiences of mothers who had experienced a period of imprisonment are presented as relating to individual factors, family factors and community/societal factors, as per a socio-ecological framework. However there is interaction between the individual and their environment across all levels (Belsky, 1980; Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The first section will look at individual factors relating to prior traumatic experiences.

6.2 Individual factors

Personal history or individual factors are those that have influenced an individual's prior life and development; they are also described as ontogenic factors (Heise, 1998). There is existing evidence that the majority of women involved in the criminal justice system have experienced prior trauma of some kind (Green *et al.*, 2005; Cook *et al.*, 2005; Corston, 2007). This section presents findings related to personal history factors which may have had an influence on offending behaviour and subsequent custodial sentences. It considers family history and childhood trauma, post-natal depression and psychosis, bereavement and loss, and alcohol and drug use. It also presents findings that offer insight into prior trauma in the family setting, as part of the wider concept of intergenerational trauma existing across the life course of the respondents and their families. This includes what may be considered to be prior trauma but also other wider structural and systemic issues which may not ordinarily be described as traumatic experiences. Many of the women had experienced some kind of prior trauma, although

they may not have directly defined it as such. Some women spoke in great detail about their prior life experiences, centring their narratives on what came before prison, whereas others disclosed less and spoke more about the experience of prison itself, or life afterwards.

6.2.1 Family history and childhood trauma

"I'd say in about 75% of my female cases there is some underlying trauma of some sort that's led to their offending really" **Probation Officer**

Although issues within childhood such as abuse, neglect or violence were not raised by all respondents, for those that did they were deeply significant. Two of the women (Laura and Andrea) specifically disclosed difficult experiences that they faced whilst growing up. It must be queried whether the actual number is higher than this as many of the women may not have felt comfortable disclosing such issues to someone they did not know well, and also within a research situation. As one practitioner suggested:

"*I would say most women [in probation cohort] have experienced some sort of childhood trauma, I know some people would argue that for everyone in the criminal justice system, but I feel it's very prevalent working with females as always the more you get to know someone, trauma is unearthed. So obviously it takes time to get to know someone and it's not always easily available to get that info from them, so whether that be a vulnerability in childhood or sexual trauma or something.*" **Probation Officer**

Andrea, for instance, did not feel able to talk about her experiences growing up in detail, but disclosed how they were continuing to affect her recovery:

"I've been working through a lot of things in my life recently that have happened. So I left home at 14, there were some big issues … I've been told I probably have PTSD." **Andrea**

Laura had experienced a period of imprisonment in her early twenties and had grown up in children's residential care. She described how during her time in the care system she was regularly approached by a man who used to come to the residential home and pick girls up:

"Yeah, a creep, paedophile or whatever…that happened in care, the staff must have seen me going in that car and stuff and me sister there at the time" **Laura**

She described how she used to run away from the residential home to her mother, but the staff would bring her back:

> *"I was screaming, and they picked us up and the social worker and the police just chucked us in the car"* **Laura**

Interviews with staff suggested that many of the women they were working with had experienced prior trauma within the family. One respondent described the following case she had worked on, relating trauma to mental health:

> "I *worked with a young female where it was her dad and her uncle that were doing that and they'd done that from quite an early age and she would be taken all over the country, they used to call it 'going on tour' so they used to go to some of the major cities round the country and she was quite a petite female very young looking she was 19, but if you didn't know she looked about 12 or 13, so she was being sexually exploited around the country … she'd been abused by her dad and her uncle from birth basically and so you were seeing the development of personality disorder, so that's something quite common we see particularly within females, personality disorders, which I believe is obviously something which develops out of trauma and coping with childhood and adolescent trauma.*" **Probation Officer**

This account begins to show the extremes of abuse some of the women in the criminal justice system have experienced. Women are more likely to experience abuse from people that they know and it has been argued that the effects of this type of abuse, from people that are meant to love and care for you, is potentially more harmful, leading to what has been termed 'complex' trauma (Herman-Lewis, 1992b). It also indicates how childhood trauma can affect the developing psyche and lead to long term mental health issues, including diagnoses of personality disorder. This kind of traumatic experience can lead to individuals becoming dislocated from legitimate social institutions such as workplaces, education and social services (Arnold, 1990), increasing the likelihood of further victimisation and risk-taking behaviour. This shows the wider impacts of trauma and how it can operate on and interact with different levels including personal, family and structural/societal levels.

Two of the mothers that were interviewed disclosed being diagnosed with personality disorder, and two with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This included Janette, who also alluded to difficulties in her childhood:

> "*Well, I've had bother with borderline personality disorder for a while, well it stems from me childhood, I've suffered from a lot of depression and I took an overdose in March or April*" **Janette**

Although Janette spoke in a quite a matter-of-fact way about her diagnosis and subsequent problems, this was perhaps a way of coping with the difficulties she was facing by attempting to minimise them. She later spoke of how prison was "*fine*" and "*a walk in the park*"; however, she was desperately trying to get contact with her children and had no fixed home at the time of interview.

Prior mental health issues were specifically reported by 15 of the women with two more talking about emotional problems in a more general sense. This ranged from specific episodes such as the post-natal depression reported in the next section, to more generalised anxiety, depression and issues such as personality disorder. Mental health issues can be understood as resulting from previous traumatic and difficult life experiences, as well as being a cause of difficulty in coping with what life brings (DeHart *et al.*, 2014; Belknap, Lynch and DeHart, 2016). In this sense, mental health conditions may be seen as a prior trauma in themselves and/or the result of a prior trauma. Poor mental health may also make women more likely to experience victimisation or engage in risk-taking behaviour (DeHart, 2008). Mental health issues were reported by the mothers during all three phases of the journey through the criminal justice system.

6.2.2 Postnatal depression and psychosis

Post-natal depression is a factor that is often underreported generally and is not usually assessed in connection with offending, despite the fact that it can be extremely debilitating and life changing (Slomian *et al.*, 2019). Post-natal depression presented as an especially salient factor identified by the research. Post-natal depression is thought to affect about 10-20% of new mothers, but it is still something mothers do not always seek help for. The potentially more serious condition, postpartum or puerperal psychosis, affects about 1-2 in 1000 new mothers (Bauer *et al.*, 2014) and can lead to extreme behavioural change, hallucinations and delusions. For women in already difficult situations, it can add to their vulnerability and ability to cope with life and motherhood. Prior research in this area is limited, with most studies coming from the field of health and generally focusing on outcomes for children (Poobalan *et al.*, 2007; Pawlby *et al.*, 2007), rather than links to mothers' offending, as outlined in **Chapter 2**. Literature that links PND to offending commonly only focuses on women who kill their own children as a result of PND (Reece, 1990) rather than other general offending behaviour that could be linked to this condition.

Three of the women interviewed (Angela, Tanya, Kerry) talked directly about their experiences of post-natal depression and how it impacted on them; for Angela and

Tanya this was prior to custody. Kerry's experiences of PND occurred whilst in custody. In an additional case (Cheryl), the impact of a stillborn child was reported as a life changing event that led to a range of other issues for her. In Angela's case (see **Case 1**) severe postnatal depression or post-partum psychosis directly led to the offence, which then changed the course of her life and that of her son from that point onwards:

> *"My son was about a year old at the time, and I had quite severe post-natal depression to the extent I was actually hearing voices in my head telling me to do things…It wasn't picked up by professionals at all at that point, it was picked up once I went to jail. My husband was quite concerned, so were social services, about two weeks before I went to jail, they were supposed to have booked a social services secure accommodation for my son, I ended up - because the voice was saying burn the house down, that we were living in."*
> **Angela**

Angela did go on to set fire to her own house, which led to a 12-month custodial sentence and resulted in her not seeing her son again until he was 16 years old. Angela was speaking about events that had occurred many years previously, and we both expressed the hope that things would be different if that situation occurred today. As it was a past event (around 20 years ago), Angela was able to recount the intergenerational impact these events had on her life, her son's life and additionally those of her grandchildren. She described the enduring legacy of her conviction that had long and far -reaching effects on her life:

> "*I've never met me first grandson, I haven't met me granddaughter yet, cos social services, still, cos of what happened 20 years ago, when I went to jail, they've still blocked me seeing my granddaughter now.*" **Angela**

Case 1: Angela

Angela's son was about a year old when she set fire to her own house whilst hearing voices due to post-natal depression. She was then convicted of arson with intent and remanded in custody receiving a 12-month sentence; her son went to live with his dad and she did not see him again until he was 16 years old. Her son now has a lot of mental health and drug issues himself and is sometimes physically abusive towards her. When her son was 7 he was taken into the care of social services as he was found shoplifting food because his dad was neglecting him. Angela's partner was also abusive towards her, but she says nobody listened to her and she did not get the help that she needed. Due to her conviction for arson, she has faced a constant battle to get accommodation, as many agencies will not house people with such convictions. Both of her son's children are now also in the care of social services. Angela wishes she got the help she needed when she needed it so that perhaps everyone's lives would have turned out differently.

For Tanya, who received a 10-month sentence for taking drugs into prison, her post-natal depression led to a deterioration in her mental health and the breakdown of her relationship:

> "*Because I had post-natal depression, the first three months, we kind of split up and that's what caused the breakdown and then he moved on with another partner so we kind of agreed terms with the baby at that time.*" **Tanya**

Tanya's PND had occurred prior to offending and was touched on quite briefly in her interview. This perhaps indicates that both women themselves, and professionals sometimes underestimate the impact post-natal depression can have on wider aspects of women's lives. In both of these cases either the post-natal depression was undiagnosed, or help was not put in place quickly enough to stop it impacting other areas of these women's lives. Post-natal depression was not something specifically mentioned in interviews by practitioners as a factor in the lives of the women they were working with. This may be because women had not specifically mentioned it, perhaps because they did not feel comfortable disclosing it, or because it was incorporated into 'depression' as a whole rather than looking at issues in the post-natal period. It is therefore possible that this is an overlooked and under-identified criminogenic need that warrants further research.

6.2.3 Bereavement and loss

Another element of prior trauma that featured in six of the women's interviews concerned narratives of bereavement and loss. This included miscarriage, loss of a parent and loss of a child or another close family member. In many cases formal support had not been accessed and it is possible that women in their role as caregiver did not give themselves the time and space to deal with these events. There is some evidence that experiences of bereavement may be a factor in offending, also linking to substance misuse as a coping mechanism (Slomian *et al.*, 2019; Hart, 2014; Rutter, 2021). As Rutter (2021) and Vaswani (2019) describe, the trauma of bereavement adds to the difficulties faced by those living in already difficult circumstances. Bereavement is therefore connected to other structural issues such as poverty and lack of support. Ability to cope with bereavement and loss requires resilience, which can be viewed as an interaction between an individual and their environment (Ungar, 2013). There is also a connection here to the separation and loss of children which occurs as a result of imprisonment, which is discussed in the next chapter.

Cheryl (see **Case 2**) described the huge impact that losing her first baby at birth had on her life:

> *"I went off the rails when I lost my son, I stayed in for like two year and I just got in with the wrong crowd when I started like associating with people again, like started taking ecstasy and speed and was drinking quite a lot. Like I was working, I stopped and started shoplifting and like I just chose a totally different lifestyle…"* **Cheryl**

It was evident during the interview that these events were still very raw in Cheryl's life, continuing to affect her everyday life and emotional wellbeing. She went on to express a lot of self-blame for the events that occurred:

> *"me son's not here and it goes round in me head and like I think I should be punished."* **Cheryl**

The idea of '*needing to be punished*' was a recurring theme in the interview due to Cheryl internalising feelings of guilt, shame and responsibility for the stillbirth of her son. This sentiment was echoed in some of the other women's narratives when they expressed guilt and shame about events that had occurred that led to their imprisonment (see **Chapter 7**, Section 7.4.2). Motz, Dennis and Aiyegbusi (2020) describe how experiencing marginalisation and unconscious guilt can lead to offending as a way of obtaining punishment and temporarily alleviating the guilt. Motz, Dennis and Aiyegbusi (2020) researched minority ethnic women and relate this to racist views in society, but it can also be seen here in attitudes towards mothers and mothering and how they are perceived. Again, these internalised feelings can be related to other structural level concepts operating in society, in this case idealised versions of motherhood.

Case 2: Cheryl

Cheryl's son was five when she went to prison. She had been charged with affray and was sentenced to three months in custody. Her son was cared for by her mother. She was shocked by the amount of drugs available in prison. Her son did not visit her in prison as she did not want him to know where she was – she said she was working away.

Cheryl said she felt as though she needed to be punished, this was due to losing a baby who was stillborn, which she still harboured a lot of guilt about. She described how she went off the rails when this happened and basically self-destructed. It continues to cause her a lot of pain. She received compensation from the hospital, which she used to buy a house. She continues to have an issue with shoplifting, which was why she was currently on probation. Her son went to live with his dad when he was 11, and she feels that this was partly due to her time in prison. She now has twin girls who live with her.

Other respondents also described how bereavement and loss of a parent had an impact on their mental health:

> *"Me mam was a great mother, she was me mam and me dad, because me dad died before I was born…I'd just lost me mam then [before entering prison] so…I didn't really get nee help at all, like in prison or nothing"* **Diane**

Another interviewee, Tammy, spoke about how losing her mum had changed things for her:

> *"I lost me mam when I was like 11-year-old, so yeah. Some days, I think, how am I still here? Things I've had to cope with, but if you don't carry on you go under, don't you?"* **Tammy**

In Lisa's case, her ex-partner and co-accused took his own life before the trial, leaving her to deal with subsequent events:

> "*I was a mess when he committed suicide, hang on you can't do this, you are, not my alibi, but you've got the evidence I need to prove that I was employed by you…*" **Lisa**

In all of these cases there was a sense that the bereavement had added to the other difficulties occurring in people's lives, compounding the sense of abandonment and hardship they were experiencing. Vaswani (2014), in research with male prisoners, describes this in terms of the 'ripple effects' of the wide-reaching impact of bereavement on respondents' lives. The evidence presented here corroborates this, and additionally shows the ongoing effects of bereavement in marginalised mothers' lives.

6.2.4 Ways of coping: alcohol and drug use

As outlined above, use of drugs and alcohol can be seen as a coping mechanism to deal with traumatic or difficult emotions arising from life events and experiences. It can also be seen, therefore, as the result of previous traumatic life experiences. Once a woman is addicted to drugs or alcohol this can lead to further offending behaviour to access more drugs or alcohol. It may also have the additional effect of exposing the individual to more traumatic experiences and risk-taking behaviour. Covington (2008) suggests that women are more likely than men to engage in self-destructive behaviour, and there is evidence that women are more likely to enter prison with a drug problem than men (41% compared to 27%) (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2015). As women are more likely to have experienced prior trauma in their lives, it can be hypothesised that the higher rate of substance misuse seen in women entering the prison system is because of this. Alcohol and drug abuse can therefore be closely linked to both trauma and mental health issues with a cycle of addiction and emotional dependence developing.

Nine of the mothers spoken to reported issues with drugs and/or alcohol. At least seven of the women had prior longstanding issues with drugs and alcohol and others,

such as Lisa and Alison had begun or increased using as a consequence of the offence and impending custodial sentence. In Lisa's case it was the stress of the impending court case, waiting for sentencing and her ex-partners suicide that led her to increase her use of alcohol and prescription painkillers as a way of getting through this period:

> *"I wasn't mentally strong at that time, cos all the pressures of the court case and everything else I was really struggling, and I started drinking really badly, I was drinking bottles and bottles of wine every day…overmedicating on my morphine, I was a mess"* **Lisa**

Alison also began using drink to cope during the wait for sentencing:

> "*I had the trauma of 12 months waiting not knowing what was going to happen. I started drinking quite heavily at this time."* **Alison**

Meanwhile, Diane described how she already had a problem with alcohol, and this led directly to the offence she was sentenced to custody for:

> *"I was on holiday, and I was an alcoholic back then, it was a year ago today, and erm I sort of went out on the drink and obviously had a little bit too much and got into me partner's car and drove it into the bridge and I woke up in the police station"* **Diane**

Bianca described herself as '*the problem*', which has echoes of Cheryl's desire to '*punish*' herself. She explained how, in her view, her criminal justice involvement and sentencing did not really impact her family, as it was she herself, that was impacting them in a negative way:

> *"It was from the age of 12, I was binge drinking all the way up until 28. I stopped meself but it's really hard….and then I ended up on heroin… I had me little one taken away as well to me mam, cos of the drinking."* **Bianca**

These different experiences begin to show how alcohol and drug use may be involved in women's lives in different ways prior to custody. In some cases, reliance on drugs or alcohol may lead to children being removed from a woman's care. A probation officer, who works mainly with women who are repeat offenders, explained how drug and alcohol use could begin after the removal of a child:

> "*Women self-medicate, they start drinking, because it blocks out all the thoughts, it blocks out all the pain and they start taking drugs and that starts their offending, so that's quite common, and then they just become reliant on it,*

the drink and the drugs, because that's the only time they're not thinking about what's happened." **Probation Officer**

This illustrates the need for more specific interventions before the problem gets to this stage in order that more families can stay together, and also that intervention should occur before entrenched drug use begins. The issue of how mothers are impacted by the removal of children from their care will be discussed further in **Section 6.3.2**.

The factors identified here as relating to individual level prior trauma including childhood issues, postnatal depression, bereavement, and drug/alcohol use begin to show the experiences often faced by criminalised mothers. It can be seen how these prior experiences interact with factors within women's current lives and environments, increasing marginalisation. Prior life experiences can leave women vulnerable to further victimisation and involvement in risky situations. Many women will try to cope with the emotions arising from their experiences by using drugs and alcohol, which can lead to offending and poor mental health. The next section will examine family factors present in the mothers' lives.

6.3 Family factors

Family or microsystem factors relate to those that are operating within the context of the immediate and wider family that an individual is currently living in. In terms of prior trauma related to family factors, intimate partner violence (IPV) is a major concern that runs throughout the women's narratives. Related to this, accounts were given of coercion from partners and sometimes family members to engage in offending behaviour. Another prior issue identified by the research, concerned the removal of children to either state care or another family member's care; in a number of cases this had occurred prior to involvement with the Criminal Justice System. This is an issue that is often overlooked by research in this area, with more focus often being placed upon the separation of mother and child caused by custody itself (Powell, Ciclitira and Marzano, 2017; Celinska and Siegel, 2010; Barnes and Stringer, 2014).

6.3.1 Coercion and intimate partner violence

As was to be expected from previous research (Green *et al.*, 2005; Corston, 2007; Ministry of Justice, 2018a; Cook *et al.*, 2005), intimate partner violence was a feature of a number of women's lives in the sample interviewed. In total, five of the 20 women spoken to disclosed intimate partner violence through the course of the interviews. Additionally, discussions concerning IPV were a constant feature of the women's hubs I attended on a regular basis, and it was cited as a major factor affecting female service

users by all of the ten practitioners interviewed. IPV or domestic abuse is not usually a one-off event but a series of behaviours that increase over time and worsen (Renzetti, Edleson and Bergen, 2018). As discussed in **Chapter 2**, living in this kind of situation can lead to severe and prolonged trauma to the individual and her children. It has been argued that abuse from someone who is supposed to love and care for you has much more devastating long term effects as it destroys trust, safety and a sense of self (Herman-Lewis, 1992b).

In some cases, the abusive partner was also the co-accused of the offence for which the woman was imprisoned and was involved in coercion to offend. In other cases IPV had been a feature of previous relationships and had led to the removal of children from the family. It can therefore be seen that IPV cuts across both ontogenic and microsystem factors and, links to wider systemic issues relating to violence against women and girls:

> "*Most of the women have been in abusive relationships and continue to be in abusive relationships, even though they might not identify it, it just runs through it all, I think most of them have had trauma earlier on in their lives and there's been some sort of abuse*" **Probation Officer**

In Kerry's case, her ex-partner was also her co-accused:

> *"when you're getting controlled and people scare you into believing what they're saying and then it ends you in this situation to where I was pretty much, if I hadn't of been scared to tell them what happened, then I probably wouldn't have ended up in prison, but because I was, it ended badly for me…I'm still not safe really 'cos he knows that I did tell in the end, so it was all for nothing really."* **Kerry**

Kerry described how she still did not feel safe or free of her ex-partner and felt that the judge did not really understand the impact this relationship had on her life and her actions. Lisa was in a similar situation, with relation to her partner and co-accused:

> *"The person who I was in a relationship with, who was my co-accused, had went bankrupt without anybody knowing and we didn't live together, and the bailiffs came in and stripped my house bare… a few days later he went and committed suicide…"*

> *"You know, I should have made sure that I hadn't put myself in a position with a man and then ended up in this position, I should not have, I should've listened to him because he [son] never liked him …this is why I need the palate, you can*

see it's all completely rearranged, hence my bad back, prolapsed discs by being thrown down the stairs." **Lisa**

In both of these cases, the male partners had been heavily involved in the offences that took place, and it appeared that the women were strongly coerced into committing crimes because of the abuse they experienced. This was explained further by practitioners:

"So, a lot of it can be around coercive control, partners influencing a woman into someone's offending, we also see a lot of women who have been convicted of a violent offence but often that is linked to the relationship, whether that has been, we see a lot of women with stabbing offences, particularly in custody and often underpinning that has been a self-defence of just years and years of abuse and then a reaction." **Probation Officer**

This also illustrates the risk that occurs, of committing a crime in self-defence in an abusive situation. In other cases, IPV led to the removal of children from the family. For instance, Tammy's partner was also abusive, which eventually led to her children being removed:

"They were in foster care. Because of their dad, had them taken off us through violence, through domestic violence." **Tammy**

Tammy goes on to explain how after this she did not care about anything anymore and she ended up living on the streets. This illustrates how women in prison have often had their children removed prior to offending and custody. Much criminological research thus far has focused on the separation of mothers and children by a custodial sentence; however, more often the separation has happened a long way prior to this. Caitlin, as is common with IPV, was purposefully isolated by her partner:

"I couldn't speak to anyone, I wasn't allowed a phone, I wasn't allowed to use the internet, like he didn't want me near anyone" **Caitlin**

Caitlin ended up being locked in the house by her partner and the police had to come to let her out. Abusive partners removing people's access to support by isolating them from others, helps to ensure that they remain trapped in the situation and are dependent on the abuser (Renzetti, Edleson and Bergen, 2018). Again, the abuse was a factor in Caitlin deciding to give up custody of her daughter, as her mental health had badly deteriorated to the point where she felt unable to cope and thought that her daughter would be better off in the care of grandparents.

Angela (see **Case 1**), who had experienced severe postnatal depression also had an abusive partner at that time:

> *"My husband was very abusive towards me, I was struggling with the relationship with him, basically the son was unplanned, but as soon as we found he was coming along, he got worse, everybody, nobody listened, they just took his side, even though I went to a social services meeting one day with a footprint across me face!"* **Angela**

This reveals the continuous issue of victim blaming for women, not being believed, and the manipulative partner taking control of all interactions with formal agencies. In Angela's case her son was removed to the abusive husband's care when she went to prison, and she did not see him again until he was 16. During that time, he was removed to the care of social services, as his father was failing to care for him appropriately after being found by police stealing food from a shop.

It is evident that IPV can be a risk to women's lives in terms of offending, on a number of levels. Firstly, through coercion to commit or cover up for crimes; and secondly, due to the consequences, such as removal of children which can lead to a sense of despair and giving up. Barr and Christian (2019) describe how coercion and control are a major factor of women's involvement with the CJS. These themes will be further explored in **Section 6.3.2**. Additionally, women who are trying to provide for children in an abusive relationship, may feel there is no option but to commit crime in order to feed their children:

> "*So, for example, some women who maybe don't have food every day, they think, oh well, I can get by, it's not a priority, but when you've got children it becomes a priority so therefore shop theft might be they were taking food to feed their family, so I think it just adds on another layer around pressures around what's expected or kind of survival offending… and often that is because relationships have been linked with domestic abuse in some way.*"
> **Voluntary Sector Worker**

In some instances, other family members were involved in offending, were already in contact with the prison service or the criminal justice system, or, as described above, had coerced them into committing offences. In other situations, it was the woman's first and only offence to date, while for others there had been prior convictions, or this was a recall to prison. Light, Grant and Hopkins (2013) found that 48% of women in prison had carried out their offence to support someone else's drug use. As Tanya told me:

"I shouldn't have done what I did, which was for me nephew, it was due to another family member and the pressures being put on him in jail, that's why I committed the crime I committed, and I took something into the prison which I shouldn't have took into the prison." **Tanya**

Intimate partner violence has been widely accepted as a common experience for women involved in the criminal justice system and particularly for those entering prison (Corston, 2007; Ministry of Justice, 2018a). However as this is a problem that cuts across society, exacerbated by inequalities and societal attitudes held about women and girls, it is not something unique to this group of women. It can be understood variously as an individual, family, and community/societal issue, as Javdani, Sadeh and Verona (2011) posit. Many women entering the CJS have witnessed domestic abuse in the family growing up or experienced it themselves both in the home and in society, thus it can be seen as an intergenerational trauma that continues to be underestimated and misunderstood in its frequency and impact. Research has begun to critically examine the wider role IPV may play in women's offending, as outlined in **Section 2.4.2** (Roberts, 2019; Jones, 2008; Moe, 2004) but as my findings show, there is still much to uncover about the wider intergenerational impact of IPV on criminalised women.

6.3.2 Child removal and contact issues

Six of the mothers had experienced children being removed either to social services care or a family member prior to them entering custody. In additional instances, mothers and their children were permanently separated by custody, which will be discussed in detail in **Chapter 6**. For those who were separated from their children at some point prior to going into prison, this was understandably a major traumatic event in their lives, and in some cases a trigger to offending. There was often little support to deal with this.

Much previous research has focused on the moment of sentencing as the time when mother/child separation occurs (Baldwin and Epstein, 2017; Minson, 2019a). It is sometimes overlooked in criminological literature that many women involved in the criminal justice system have experienced the removal of one or more children prior to entering custody. It was made apparent early in the research process that this was the case; members of staff from involved organisations voiced this in a preliminary research planning meeting, as did probation staff during interviews:

"A lot of them have had their children taken off them, so again, they have to deal with that trauma, particularly the women I supervise there's always

children's services involved, I seem to have a few women at the moment, all tends to be alcohol and abusive relationships and they've had their children taken off them. So they're dealing with that and then they want the alcohol to help deal with that," **Probation Officer**

In Sarah's case, her alcohol issues had led to her children being put into the care of their father while she was in a rehabilitation unit. Sarah, who was on probation, was the only one of the mothers interviewed who had not been to prison. She approached me directly during a hub session and asked to take part in an interview and was included in the research as many of the issues she was experiencing were relevant to the study. She had started drinking when her relationship with the father of her children broke down and she then had to leave the family home. She agreed for him to have care of the children while she underwent rehabilitation for alcohol, but had now found that she was not able to see her children and was not allowed to contact them or her ex-husband. Sarah felt that she had done what was required of her by stopping drinking, but that she had been let down as no one was doing anything to help. She was aware that getting angry or going back to drinking would not help but it felt like she was on the edge of making a bad decision and losing what she had achieved. This particularly highlights the need for appropriate intervention at the right time for women in this situation, before they give up and get more involved in risk-taking and offending behaviour.

Tanya's son was removed from her care suddenly, due to social services being made aware of her new partner's previous criminal history. This led to a long battle in the family courts to get some contact with her son, and to Tanya committing a crime whilst "*at a really low point*". As with Sarah, Tanya seemed unsure what the process of regaining contact with her son was, or how to go about achieving this. In Tanya's case, the removal of her son to his dad triggered many issues for her:

> "*She [social worker] came and took me son and put me son with his father to live permanently, like and caused a great big amount of upset, heartache, anxiety, depression, absolutely you name it…*" **Tanya**

Bianca felt that her own behaviour was the thing that impacted most on her children's lives. She was at a point where she felt her behaviour was the main factor causing problems for them. This narrative of self-blame relates to Cheryl's experience as outlined in **Section 6.2.3**. Bianca had four children, all of which were now in her mother's care due to her drug and alcohol problems. Although she had stopped

drinking, she then became addicted to heroin and was currently being prescribed methadone:

> "*I had a drinking problem, a really bad one and it was binge drink, I used to binge drink and I was always in bother with the police then and erm ended up going to prison, me mam had me er kids and then I found out I was pregnant with another one in there…and then, it was fine really, went in there but when I got out I had me little one taken away as well to me mam, cos of the drinking, I've stopped now, I haven't drank for 6 years and then that's what happened really.*" **Bianca**

Caitlin, 22, had experienced an abusive relationship and struggled with her mental health prior to going to prison:

> "*I had her (daughter) until she was four-month-old and then my mental health completely just went downhill because of her dad, so me and her dad ended…so I signed custody over*" **Caitlin**

Caitlin had signed over custody of her daughter to her ex-partners family due to a deterioration in her mental health at that time. She had since regretted this decision and had been trying to regain contact. At the time of speaking to her, she was struggling to maintain any contact with her daughter and although she knew she was being well-cared for, felt concerned that her daughter would not know who she was. Again, she was having to face the prospect of the family courts in order to gain some contact, although she did not really know where to start:

> "*I did try to get her back because I realised it wasn't what I wanted, like it was gonna make it worse not having her and because I'd already signed her over though social services, the court was having none of it, cos they didn't understand why I suddenly didn't want me daughter there but suddenly then did want her home, which was the worst thing ever, like I've tried now, she's four next year, I've tried for four year to get her home, but …*" **Caitlin**

Caitlin and others displayed an apparent sense of helplessness and of giving up, which is understandable. Women often felt that they had done what was asked of them (see Sarah above), but they were still not allowed any contact, so they had become increasingly hopeless and despairing. There also appeared to be a lack of the right kind of information and support for women to navigate child contact issues successfully.

> "*it's normally because of either domestic abuse and so that's why a lot of mine don't have their children and then when they've lost their children, that relationship's broken down and a lot of them it's then led to mental health, drugs, alcohol and it's been a downward spiral.*" **Probation Officer**

This illustrates the interaction between IPV, removal of children from the family home, and deterioration in mental health. As Tammy states:

> "*Once you get stuck in that rut of domestic violence and physical and mentally you don't know how to get out of it. When I lost the children, yeah, I had nothing else to lose, he didn't frighten us anymore, I started being violent towards him. Well, that's when I turned to drink, yeah, I couldn't wake up in the morning without having a drink of vodka. And I lost me mam when I was like 11-year-old, so yeah, some days I think how am I still here? Things I've had to cope with but if you don't carry on you go under don't you. hmmm.*" **Tammy**

She described how she turned to drink and became homeless and then began committing offences to survive. It is evident that removing a child can be a trigger for other negative life events, particularly using negative coping strategies such as drink and drugs, that then lead onto offending behaviour and further problems. Broadhurst and Mason (2020) describe the 'psychosocial crisis' that occurs when a child is removed from its mother followed by additional cumulative longer-term consequences such as role loss, social penalties and civil disqualification. This is an area that would benefit from further research, specifically in relation to the connection with female offending.

Practitioner interviews also highlighted the issues for women who have had children removed from their care:

> "*She had her first two children removed, but there was definitely a marked difference after that in terms of her offending, her drinking levels and if she was sitting here today, she would say she simply didn't care, she couldn't care who she upset, who she hurt, whether she went into prison or not, she didn't care about being arrested, being in police cells any of that, she just simply wasn't bothered because she hasn't got her children, so there was nothing to fight for.*" **Probation Officer**

> "*Women being punished, having their children removed, women in a violent relationship having their children removed because they've stayed with a partner, I've also seen many times over the years that that child then ends up*

with the partner or the partner's family and you kind of think, that behaviour started somewhere." **Probation Officer**

The issue of removing children from a woman's care due to an abusive partner is a very difficult and contentious one. On the one hand punishing the mother for failing to protect the children seems counterintuitive, but from a social work perspective there may be no choice when a child is at risk.

This section has outlined the connection between IPV, coercion and child removal highlighting the links with poor mental health, trauma and drug and alcohol abuse. It is evident that for some particularly vulnerable women, these traumas combine until they are struggling to survive in their everyday lives.

6.4 Community and societal factors

In this section I report on factors within the community and society that have contributed to prior trauma experienced by mothers who have been in custody. Factors relating to the community level that emerged from the interviews included issues such as housing, poverty, access to benefits and community relationships. Another significant issue identified for this cohort of mothers was relationship breakdown, and the consequent financial and social pressures that this created. Also highlighted were difficulties created by systems such as the criminal justice system in terms of sentencing processes and access to appropriate support services when needed. There are also wider societal level issues, such as how criminalised women, and, in particular, mothers are viewed and wider issues of violence against women and girls. The interconnectedness of these issues meant that in many cases they cut across all areas of women's lives and from a socio-ecological viewpoint, different levels of this nested construct. The next section will present findings around 'pressure to provide', followed by consideration of housing and sentencing issues.

6.4.1 Pressure to provide

Several of the women reported that the breakdown of a relationship had been a trigger to their offending in some way. This often led to financial pressures on the family unit, in some cases due to a perceived need to continue to provide material goods to a certain level. Due to this some of the women talked about working long hours and putting work first, as opposed to prioritising their children. This is clearly a gendered viewpoint; for most men the expectation would be that work takes priority, but the mothers interviewed clearly felt guilt about work taking precedence over family commitments.

This was particularly pertinent in cases where women had been working and were consequently convicted of committing fraud, usually against their employer. The women did not directly blame their relationship breakdown or use it as an excuse but described how the subsequent disruption impacted on their lives. When Linda's marriage broke down, she was left in a precarious financial situation in addition to the emotional distress it caused:

> *"I was in a right mess at home, with my husband was leaving: he-it was just a mess and I was devastated, absolutely devastated, erm, and he put the house up for sale. I did a big mistake, I've used some money that I shouldn't have used from work and thought, oh the house will be sold, I'll put that money straight back, and of course it didn't and I had to own up what I'd done."* **Linda**

Alison also explained the pressures she felt as a single parent:

> *"My two boys were 18 and 20 at the time I went in [to prison]. They went to live with their father's dad. They had lost their father two years ago. Well relationship breakdown and then their father dying, and I suppose my drinking. I felt under pressure to provide for the children, I didn't want to disappoint them."* **Alison**

The financial pressure that relationship breakdown and the death of a partner can put on families who may have previously just been getting by, is quite significant. Some of the women described how they felt this pressure to provide for their children and give them what their peers had:

> "*Because the boys' friends had all the latest gear and you know the latest trainers and X-Boxes, I wanted to give them that, we didn't lead some sort of lavish lifestyle, but if they wanted something they got it and you know what I did was wrong and it was over a long period of time, it was greed for wanting more and it got out of hand*." **Samantha**

Similarly, as Naomi describes:

> "*It was no lavish life because I was spending it on my children, I mean my son was decked out in diamonds, virtually*" **Naomi**

One consequence of the long hours some women were working was that they spent less time with their families:

"But it's really strange as my son never wanted for anything but what he really wanted was love, so although he had everything materially, now he says I'd rather if you'd been at home more." **Lisa**

"My son used to get cross with me constantly and ask me, why? We didn't need you to buy all this stuff, you didn't need to do this." **Samantha**

In many cases the children's dad was not mentioned at all: women were being left to provide financially, emotionally and practically for their children on their own. Previous research has suggested that becoming a mother can exacerbate poverty and increase reliance on welfare benefits (Campbell, 2020). Unsurprisingly, this suggests a gender imbalance with regard to caring responsibilities that goes wider than these individual families, as one staff member explained:

"I also think women are the main caregiver so they carry, or they feel that they carry a lot of responsibility if there's children involved, and I think that adds with it a lot of pressure which leads them to maybe make choices that maybe they wouldn't have if they didn't have children." **Voluntary Sector Worker**

Staff members also talked about the link between financial issues and offending, with women in some cases being coerced into offending on behalf of the partner or other family member:

"I've had examples, many examples of females whereby they would have to go out and shoplift on behalf of the partner or go out in terms of sex work." **Probation Officer**

"there's been a few that we've worked with where it's pressure of school, for the kids, they've got a ski trip coming up and we're the only ones that can't afford it, and it's £900, and you think, well, I can't afford £900 to just pull out so it's because of the pressures, the bairns want to go and they go down routes such as shoplifting in an attempt to try and meet what the kids want. With all the best intentions of doing this because I love me kids, not thinking that the consequences of that will be that you get separated from the children ultimately due to a custodial sentence." **Probation Officer**

This also relates to the idea of 'survival offending' outlined in **Section 6.3.1**, whereby women, particularly those in abusive relationships, were offending to provide for their children. In some cases, this can also involve sex work, as mentioned above, although none of the mothers in this research disclosed this. A probation officer elaborated how women may not necessarily view what they are engaging in as 'sex work':

> "*It can be sometimes as basic as kind of engaging in sex work to get somewhere to stop for the night or to get one bag of heroin or because I think people still have that vision that 'sex worker' is someone that's working on the streets, or out of a home, that's almost like, that's what you kind of identify yourself as and that's your job, but sometimes it's just informal where you're either having to do it to survive or to get somewhere to stop for the night.*"
> **Probation Officer**

This evidence shows how financial issues and family responsibilities add to the issues criminalised mothers may be facing. This is supported by previous research such as Masson (2019) and Baldwin (2021). In this research, poverty and financial issues are viewed as traumatic experiences in themselves that potentially lead to further victimisation and risk-taking behaviour as outlined above. They are often also interconnected with issues such as domestic abuse, sexual violence and marginalisation.

6.4.2 Housing issues

Housing issues and homelessness were a major problem for many of the women interviewed: this was an issue both before and after prison and in many cases a major cause of stress whilst in custody as well. Housing and tenancy concerns created problems both for the women themselves and their families on the outside. Some of these complex housing related factors are discussed below. Previous research, such as Masson (2019), has also found pre-existing housing issues among women entering custody. In Tammy's case, she was homeless before she went to prison, and this was tied up with her offending:

> "*Yeah, I was living on the streets, yeah, that was very hard, first time I'd ever experienced it and it was hard. I left a property up in XXXX and the landlord wasn't doing anything, so I just made meself homeless basically, which was a big mistake. Yeah, about a year, it was tough. I think if I didn't have me partner, 'cos she's lived on the streets before, I think if I didn't have her, I don't know where I would've been.*" **Tammy**

Lack of suitable housing means that vulnerable women, in particular, can be left in a situation where committing an offence and receiving a short custodial sentence is the only way to get food and shelter. A staff respondent also noted how being homeless can ultimately lead to a period in custody:

> "*I've got a lot of women who are homeless and, it's fine, I'd rather be in there [prison] cos then I get a bed and I get three meals a day.*" **Probation Officer**

Housing was one of the issues most frequently raised by staff interview respondents and was something that was obviously causing them a lot of difficulty for various reasons, which will be discussed in more detail in **Chapter 8**. Another staff respondent recounted the following situation, illustrating the devastating consequences of not allocating suitable accommodation to vulnerable women:

> "*one woman I'm working with, she was in a domestic violence relationship, she'd never tried drugs, never committed an offence, she was just a victim of DV, they rang a DV refuge to see if they had any vacancies, yes we do have a bed, when she got down here it turns out they didn't have a bed, there was some mix up, I don't know what it was and they put her into a hostel, the first night in the hostel, she was a hundred and something miles away from home, she knew nobody, she was beaten, her emotions were absolutely on the floor, someone came and was kind to her, as she describes them, 'he was lovely, he told us it'd be alright and he'd keep an eye on us while I'm here' and then gave her heroin! And then got her addicted to heroin, and then she started using cocaine and crack and everything that goes along with that, and then she couldn't fund that lifestyle of using heroin, so she started shoplifting, and that's just quite typical, where it was a failure of professionals not placing her into a suitable and stable accommodation and now she's one of the most prolific [offenders] in the North East.*" **Probation Officer**

Whereas Lisa, who had previously been working and in stable accommodation, was made homeless and unemployed as a result of her arrest:

> "*When I lost my house before going to prison, before going to you know trial, erm, I lost my home and basically what happened was I ended up living in a car, and then I sent my son off to his girlfriend's, and he went down and stayed with his girlfriend, I was living in a Volkswagen Polo, which was wonderful! Paying a pound a week to go and get showered in the local leisure centre and so I mean our relationship was already strained, and you know, nobody expected me to be convicted.*" **Lisa**

Lisa was living in her car for over a year whilst awaiting sentencing. The length of time between arrest and sentencing was raised as an issue by a number of the mothers, as will be discussed in the next section on sentencing issues. It is clear that housing issues are entwined with financial issues such as unemployment and can also be

related to IPV. In **Chapter 8** housing issues that have arisen as a result of imprisonment will be detailed, showing that in many cases housing issues are related to all three traumatic phases of the journey of maternal imprisonment.

6.4.3 Sentencing issues

In terms of prior trauma, a number of the women interviewed spoke about the difficulties of the time period between arrest and sentencing. In some cases, after a very long wait, women were then suddenly sentenced when they were not expecting it and were then taken directly to prison. This can make it even more difficult for parents who are the main carers of dependent children. The period waiting to be sentenced had a great impact on the women's mental health and their financial and housing situation, particularly where they were unable to work:

> *"We were waiting a year for it to go to court as well, so for realistically, probably two years when you're waiting for all that, probably the stress leading up to the court date was worse than actually going through everything else."* **Samantha**

> *"The worst bit was the bit being questioned by police and the time it took to go to court, that was erm...over a year."* **Linda**

In addition, many of the women were assured by legal advisers that they would not get a custodial sentence, which, by the time it proved to be incorrect meant that they had not been able to give prior consideration to the care of their children:

> *"I didn't tell anyone, the day I was going to court, I made arrangements for my daughter to stay at a friend's house and thinking, well, I'll be home tonight whatever…but I got a custodial sentence"* **Linda**

> *"I got sentenced, but it was my first ever offence, so everyone was expecting me not to go to jail and get like a supervision order or something, but no."* **Caitlin**

In Tanya's case, she was originally given a suspended sentence but when her ex-husband told the family court that he was the registered carer for their son (who at the time was living with the defendant), her sentence was changed:

> *"I was back at court and the judge called it an 'exorcising of sentencing', so he exorcised my sentence because they wanted us in jail. Initially I didn't get sentenced to jail, so he [son] could've still been with me doing well, but the fact*

of it was his dad didn't want that….so that's what happened the judge
sentenced us to jail. Yes- after I'd been sentenced." **Tanya**

A number of practitioner respondents raised disparities around gender and sentencing, particularly in relation to offences concerning non-attendance at school:

"*I've got four [women] for non-school attendance and you just think, that's quite*
a high percentage that I've got, if I've got 12 and four of them are for that and
I've had one man for non-school attendance, but that's quite a regular thing that
comes up on our caseload for that." **Probation Officer**

This illustrates some of the wider inequalities within the criminal justice system itself and questions who state agencies hold ultimately responsible for a dependant child's care. The period of time between being charged and being sentenced is also likely to be a traumatic period for women's families. In many cases mothers tried to keep information about their offence and criminal justice involvement from their children, but with older children this is more difficult. As Naomi describes:

"W*hen I went on that Saturday morning, I didn't think I was coming back to the*
house so I did think, I was really frightened, but I didn't want to show it, it was
my son that answered the door to the police as well, the youngest one, so I
think it was starting to affect him and when they seen me go away with CID, you
know, I do think, I couldn't look back at them, put it that way, I couldn't see their
faces, but I got out and so things were all right in the house, a bit on
tenterhooks, not knowing when the police would be coming back, because they
said they would be coming back." **Naomi**

Naomi's son ended up quitting university and going to Australia to try and avoid having to see her go into prison, as he was struggling to cope with the idea of her being incarcerated. It is therefore evident how traumatic this period can be both for women and their families.

6.5 Summary

This chapter has presented evidence from interviews with mothers who have experienced imprisonment, and staff who work with them, concerning evidence of prior trauma in the lives of mothers who have experienced a period of imprisonment. Using a socio-ecological approach to analysis, it has identified individual level, family level and community/societal level elements of trauma evident in women's lives. As socio-ecological frameworks see individuals as existing within the influences of their

environment, it is important to connect the impact that these different levels of trauma have on women's lives.

The women reported that they had experienced prior trauma in their lives in a range of different ways. This included trauma within their family whilst growing up and also within their current family setting. Many of the women spoke about bereavement and loss, including the premature death of family members, partners and in one case the loss of a child at birth. A significant number of women spoke about their struggles with postnatal depression and how this affected other areas of their lives.

Intimate partner violence was a common feature of the prior trauma in the mothers' lives. This included coercion to offend in addition to emotional and physical abuse. In some cases, this had led to the removal of children, which caused further trauma to the women concerned. Community and societal factors identified included poverty related to being a single parent and issues with housing. Some women spoke about the stressful impact of the period between arrest and sentencing and how this led to a deterioration in mental wellbeing.

In many cases, prior trauma creates disadvantage and vulnerability that can lead women to be further exposed to risky situations and traumatic experiences. As outlined in **Section 6.3** the connection between IPV, mental health and child removal resulting in substance misuse is of concern. We can then see how wider social attitudes and issues such as housing and poverty connect with this, resulting in severe disadvantage with people being left to cope on their own at the lowest points in their lives. The following chapter will present findings from the data regarding the traumatic impact of the period of imprisonment itself on mothers and their families.

Chapter 7: The traumatic impact of prison on mothers and their families

7.1 Introduction

> "*Your assumption, if a woman goes to prison, she's done something serious, whereas in reality, often they haven't.*" **Probation Officer**

This chapter will set out evidence from my research regarding the traumatic impact of the experience of imprisonment on mothers and their families. In terms of the concept of intergenerational trauma, there will be a particular focus on the effects on children and kinship carers during the period of custody. The data will be examined using a socio-ecological framework in order to understand the individual, family, community and societal factors produced as the experience of custody cuts across all four of these levels. The traumatic experience for the individual, the impact on their family and the stigma and difficulties experienced from the community all intertwine. The first traumatic phase of maternal imprisonment was outlined in **Chapter 6** and relates to prior trauma. The period of incarceration can be seen as the second period of trauma within the context of maternal imprisonment and is perhaps the one most usually focused upon by research.

Previous research has identified in particular the pains of imprisonment, the issues for mothers regarding separation from children, and to some extent the issues for families and kinship carers providing support in the community (Crewe, Hulley and Wright, 2017; Foster, 2012; Slotboom *et al.*, 2011). Anderson, Pitner and Wooten (2020) also describe this as 'incarceration-based trauma' (IBT). This research will evidence how women cope with imprisonment, including what helps them get through their sentence. In some cases, positive aspects of imprisonment have been identified, which will also be outlined.

Any period of custody will have a profound disruptive effect on an individual's life. In the case of mothers, who are often the primary carers of dependent children, this impact can be more severe and wide ranging. As outlined in **Chapter 6**, many women entering the prison system have experienced prior difficulties in their lives, which may be related or unrelated to the criminal justice process itself. The ripple effect of a custodial sentence can overlap into children's and families' lives and cause irreparable damage as the trauma is passed on. The evidence presented in this chapter will attempt to describe and uncover these effects in order to understand the extent of the disruption experienced across the generations.

As outlined in **Chapter 5**, the women involved in the research come from very different backgrounds, including those who were in full time employment and those who were caring for children full time. For the majority of the women (17 out of 19), it was their first and only period of custody to date, one was released and then recalled for breach whilst on tag, and one had experienced two previous custodial sentences. Firstly, individual factors, such as, mothers' descriptions of their initial experiences in custody will be considered, followed by a focus on emotional wellbeing and coping. The second section will centre on separation from children and the consequent impact on the mothering role and the family. The final section will examine community and societal factors, such as prison procedures and visits, and stigma.

7.2 Individual factors

While the research focused on trauma and difficult experiences, this was not necessarily the story that was told by the mothers. Although for many custody was a life changing experience and one that they would not choose to repeat, it was now a part of their lives, and there were examples of how women had grown as a result of the experience, become more resilient, and developed a greater understanding of the issues faced by others in the criminal justice system. That is not to say that custody particularly helped them in any way. There was a certain resignation implicit within the narratives, summed up by descriptions of having to deal with it and get on with it. In most cases, the women, did not have anyone to challenge what was happening to them and their children on their behalf.

In a number of the narratives, there was a sense of frustration, exasperation and shock at the chain of events that led up to custody, particularly for those women who had gone from a having a relatively normal life, with home, children and work, to having this disrupted by the situation that then unfolded. Some went from going to work one day to, "*a mess*", "*drinking really badly*" or "*living in a car*". The contrast between home life before, and "*everyday having the kids*" to *"not having the kids, not speaking to them*" was extreme in many cases.

As introduced in **Chapter 6, Section 6.4.2** a common feeling that was expressed was, as Lisa said, "*nobody expected me to be convicted*", which was often brought to the fore by solicitors, partners and family members. This is particularly unhelpful when children are involved and no preparations have therefore been made for their care, whether practically, emotionally or financially. There was an assumption from judiciary that family members could just step in, as Kerry described to me:

"*The judge said because my mum could make a bottle, that basically my mum could look after the baby as well, yeah, but she's got really bad arthritis and she does struggle moving around or even to make a cup of tea, so it was kind of like the judge didn't listen to that.*" **Kerry**

This experience suggests that female family members in particular are assumed to be able to drop everything in order to care for children, illustrating the gender issues in society which come to the fore in these situations. This links into wider structural and societal issues impacting on maternal imprisonment.

7.2.1 Initial experiences in custody

Within an ecological framework, prison can be viewed as a 'community' level construct, with wider ideas about female prisoners coming at a societal level. However, individual women bring their own personal histories, and this must also be seen within their current family context. As outlined in **Chapter 6**, a number of the women had to wait for a considerable length of time between arrest and sentencing. This was a very stressful time for the whole family, both emotionally and financially. In some cases, women were unable to work and one woman ended up living in her car (see Lisa, **Case 5, this chapter**). Many of the women were advised by their legal teams that they would not be given a custodial sentence. The consequence of this advice was that they were not fully prepared for the prospect of being sentenced to custody. For instance, Cheryl spoke of how she had not arranged for anyone to pick her son up from school. Probation staff said there was often then a rush to find a suitable carer for a child, and that in some cases carers were not suitable, but instead were more of a last resort. This is illustrated by Angela (**see Case 1, Chapter 6**) who also spoke of how her son was sent to live with his dad, but later ended up in social services care as he was not being cared for appropriately.

Samantha was told that she would be sentenced at a later date but turned up for a court hearing and was immediately sent to prison that day. Others, such as Lisa and Naomi, had waited a long time for sentencing, and in this period their mental health had deteriorated, and their financial situations worsened. Only one woman, Stacey, was fully prepared for a custodial sentence and had saved up money and resources (nappies etc.) for her child whilst she was in custody. There is an issue raised here about how we prepare primary carers and particularly mothers, for sentencing. In many cases women attended court for sentencing on their own, due to the shame and stigma associated with female imprisonment. They were often ill-prepared for the court process and fearful of exposing the truth about what was going on in their lives. Issues

around coercion, intimate partner violence (**Lisa, Case 5, this chapter** and **Kerry, Case 4, this chapter**) and the loss of a child at birth (**see Cheryl, Case 2, Chapter 6**) were particularly difficult to disclose and therefore were often not spoken about in court.

Women's initial experiences of custody revealed the shock of the environment and a sense of bewilderment at not understanding how prison rules and systems work. In this way there was a colliding of their personal, and family factors within the context of the prison. As Alicia describes:

> "*I suffer from panic attacks and the first initial thought of when I got in was the small room, it was like, all I couldn't get in me head was I can't get out of this room, which then made it worse because once you get in and your door's locked then that's it, the first few nights were the worse.*" **Alicia**

> "*The first week I didn't even come out of my room, because you're petrified of everything, until this day I'd never been in a police cell or anything you know, but yeah, I didn't come out of my room or anything.*" **Samantha**

Danielle recounted how she was placed in a detox room, despite having no drug or alcohol addictions:

> "*When you first go in, you're stuck in reception for ages, I was the first one up in court, got sentenced and didn't get to my room until quarter to seven at night, then I was put on a detox room, I wasn't a de-toxer so it was the wrong room for me to start with.*" **Danielle**

This issue was also raised by Masson (2019), in her research with mothers experiencing their first short periods of imprisonment. Some of the mothers also spoke of the emotional and sensory impact of the prison environment:

> "*Being in there on that first day, just it was a blur, I think it was a blur for a couple of days, but you just hear noises, banging of the doors, the keys, that is just all you hear…..now I knew when I was getting out but I didn't know where to go and ask if I needed the bedding, what I do in the morning, I felt like I was at school but going back in years, like a kid has got to keep asking somebody.*" **Naomi**

> "*I just sat and cried the full day whole I was in the holding cell and when I got to jail, but I had me visit, the first one, the next day and I just sat and cried for the full time of that as well.*" **Caitlin**

Previous research has also identified how women in particular can be infantilised by imprisonment (Masson, 2019; Wahidin, 2004). A number of respondents, such as Naomi and Caitlyn, compared elements of prison to school in their narratives, relating the rules and loss of autonomy and rights in this comparison:

> *"Jail is ridiculous, it's literally like the school you can't leave, like you get up in the morning and have your breakfast, go to work or go to education, you come back have your dinner and then go and do it all over again and then, at like 6 o' clock you go for your tea and come back for seven and go to bed. Like it's a boring school you just can't leave."* **Caitlin**

Others, including Tanya, Lisa and Dianne, talked about concerns with other prisoners:

> *"No one believed us, that that's what had happened. So they called us a 'kiddy fiddler', a 'nonce' they called us, yeah."* **Tanya**

> *"The other thing is because I got such a high sentence and because my crime is so ridiculous people accused me of being a paedophile in prison. Five years two months, you're a kiddy fiddler! And I got that every day and I had one fight in prison and that was because somebody said you've got to have been, because I didn't know this kiddy fiddlers get told to say you're in for fraud, so when everybody said what're you in for and I said I'm in for fraud…"* **Lisa**

> *"But it was really bad there like, really bad, like with it being like the first time I'd been into prison, it was me first time obviously, I was getting bullied, I lost loads of weight."* **Diane**

These accusations and bullying from other prisoners, added to the traumatic impact for the mothers. The cumulative effects of the prison environment, separation from children and loss of autonomy meant that many of the mothers reported issues with their mental health, as outlined in the following section.

Another issue, which is well documented within the literature on prisons, concerns the availability of drugs (Plugge, Yudkin and Douglas, 2009; O Hagan and Hardwick, 2017) and in some cases this was related to coercion and bullying from other prison residents. It was therefore, no surprise that five of the women (including Lisa, Cheryl and Alison) mentioned the presence of drugs in custody:

> *"The first thing that was said to me when I got on the induction wing was, you got any gear on you? And I'm like, no, you not got nothing stuffed? No, and that was the first thing they did, looking for drugs all the time"* **Lisa**

> "*It was the first time I'd ever smelt heroin, like somebody was taking it in the next cell and locked themselves in and the screws had to come and open the cell, it was the first time I'd smelt it, the first time I'd been around people who took it.*" **Cheryl**

> "S*o when I first went into prison I went straight onto the detox wing for the first 7 days. It was...it wasn't nice, full of people with drink and drugs issues, it was a massive culture shock to be honest, it was very difficult.*" **Alison**

In the local prison, which many of the women had been sent to, there was a particular issue with the prescription drug, Buscopan, which is generally prescribed for irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), as Danielle told me:

> "*Drugs were really bad, really easy to get your hands on, really easy, I mean the Buscopan fans were going off nearly every day, it's really easy.*" **Danielle**

Of note here is the fact that, the women describing their experiences above, had not been using drugs or been around or witnessed drug use before entering prison. It is evident that they appeared, in some cases, quite shocked and concerned by the drug use they were suddenly confronted with. Moore and Scraton (2014) describe how witnessing other people's struggle with drugs is stressful for prisoners. The support that got people through those initial days and hours was generally from the prison staff, and in some cases friends, who knew the ropes:

> "*I can honestly say, the family worker, who I had in prison, if it wasn't for her, I think, like, I would've absolutely broke, because I was able to speak with her, and she could relay messages back to my family.*" **Tanya**

> "*I have to say that the officers there got me through it, they were fantastic, I just did what my officer who was allocated to me said, just sort of keep your head down, do what you're asked to do, keep yourself busy and you'll be fine.*"
> **Samantha**

What stands out from these testimonies is the lack of preparedness for the situation the women were placed into. Alongside this, in many cases, they had the wider worries of what was happening for their children and when they would be able to have contact with them. The initial shock of being sentenced to custody, the physical and social environment and the experience of being ripped away from children, home and family can be seen as a traumatic event for most mothers who experience it. It is arguable that these 'pains' of imprisonment are felt more acutely by women and can therefore be called a 'trauma', which in many cases adds to the prior trauma they may have

experienced, as outlined in **Chapter 6.** The concern for mothers who will in many cases be the primary carer of their children, is the additional trauma enacted intergenerationally specifically on their children but often also on grandparents who are left caring for them.

7.2.2 Emotional wellbeing

Most mothers reported that the prison experience had a negative impact on their mental health, particularly in the first few weeks. For some this resulted in self-harming behaviour. Women in prison are reported to have higher rates of self-harm than men (Ministry of Justice, 2021b). Walker *et al.* (2021) describe self-harm as a way of regulating mood, dealing with intense emotions, and, for some, as an act of self-punishment. For mothers, they found that triggers to self-harm were related to past trauma, separation from family and children, and deteriorating mental health. Chamberlen (2016) further depicts self-harm as 'emotion work' which is exhibited and viewed on the body. Motz, Dennis and Aiyegbusi (2020) view it as a way of asserting control over one's body, seeing it as potentially giving agency. Caitlin, for example, described how not being with her family was very difficult:

> "*When I first got in there it was hard, 'cos I was way from my family and I really did struggle, like I was self-harming for it*" **Caitlin**

Caitlin was the only one of the mothers who spoke directly about self-harm; however, others spoke about self-punishment and severe weight loss, including Lisa and Diane, which could also be understood as self-injurious behaviour. As outlined in **Chapter 6** some mothers spoke about alcohol and drug, use which again could be construed as self-harming behaviour. Others developed anxiety whilst in custody; for example, Samantha's emotional state was characterised by overwhelming anxiety:

> "*I didn't experience the main jail, because when they were going to move me, I had a panic attack, so they kept me where I was.*" **Samantha**

> "*I had a mental and physical breakdown in the jail, like so my head and senses and everything emotionally was taken out of this world, the real world if you like, and put in this jail where I hit rock bottom.*" **Tanya**

Four of the mothers spoke about being placed on an Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork plan (ACCT) in the early days. ACCT is the care planning process for prisoners who are at particular risk of suicide or self-harm (Pike and George, 2019). Kerry explained:

> "*I was put on an ACCT, I think it's called, erm, where they were kind of monitoring me to make sure I was all right and stuff, ended up back on my antidepressants*" **Kerry**

This provides further evidence on the traumatic impact of imprisonment for mothers. Some of the women spoke about how, once the cell door was shut, all you had were your own thoughts:

> "*All you had to do was sit and think, that's it, just sit and think*" **Danielle**

> "*I'd had problems for a few years, but I'd stopped doing it (self-harming), but when I went to jail it just completely brought it back on, like it was the only way I could cope, because they give you distraction packs but when you're colouring that much, they don't give you pencil sharpeners because you're not allowed them…I ended up getting put on ACCTs and then checked every hour, that just makes it even worse because I was finally getting to sleep after hours and then getting woke up with a torch in me face*" **Caitlin**

For these women, particularly those with traumatic prior experiences, as outlined in **Chapter 6**, prison gave them more time to think, increasing their guilt and shame about the chain of events leading to custody. In many cases emotional wellbeing was compounded by the effect of the stigma of being a mother in prison, relating prior trauma to wider societal views.

Case 3: Caitlin

Caitlin was 22 and had one daughter. She did not see her daughter while she was in prison. She had received a 20 month sentence for a drugs offence along with her boyfriend, who was co-accused and currently still in prison. Caitlin had mental health problems and, as she was not coping well, had signed over care of her daughter to the father's parents. They were now refusing to let her see her daughter at all. She was currently trying to get some contact back. Caitlin had been in an abusive relationship with her daughter's father who now had nothing to do with her. At one point he had locked her in the house and left with the keys.

Caitlin had self-harmed in prison as a way of coping and ended up on an ACCT with hourly checks. She had also attempted suicide on a number of occasions. She had begun taking drugs after leaving prison and had been homeless for a period. She had come out on tag but found it really hard as she was basically in a flat on her own, with nothing. She had then broken her licence conditions and been returned to prison. She was concerned that her daughter would forget who she was and was hoping to get her life in order so that both herself and her boyfriend had a chance of getting some contact with their children.

7.2.3 Coping with prison

In terms of coping with the prison environment and managing mental health in custody a number of themes emerged from the interviews. Coping can be understood as how a person deals with a stressful event, and has been described as either problem-focused or emotion-focused. With emotion-focused coping, attempts to manage emotional distress are utilised, whereas for problem-focused coping, an evaluation takes place and steps are taken to resolve the issues (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Chamberlen (2018) whose work centres on the body, outlines coping in terms of embodied emotions, and describes how prisoners use food and drugs as part of coping. Self-harm (see previous section) may also be seen as a coping strategy.

Previous research has shown how friendships can be an important means of coping in the prison environment (Crewe, 2009), although as described in **Section 7.2.1,** other prisoners can also be a source of trauma and stress. Camaraderie and friendships were mentioned by six of the women, such as Lisa and Linda:

> "*I had a genuine friendship with X, I mean we laughed, every free moment she was in my cell or I was in hers*" **Lisa**

> "*[prison was] terrifying…but some of the nicest people you meet and you support one another and you did have a laugh*" **Linda**

For many women, it would have been their first experience of an all-female environment and the support that this provided was cited as being helpful in coming to terms with prison, as Lisa describes:

> "*So I'm in prison with all these girls with their fabulous eyebrows and everything and one of the girls acquired a brown pencil from the art classroom for me and every morning I used to pencil them on.*" **Lisa**

Another factor for survival mentioned was keeping your head down and keeping out of trouble:

> "*I just kept meself to meself and doing what was asked of us, instead of making it harder for myself, if they asked us to do something, I done it. I'd done a bereavement course, which I'd never done, when I lost me ma.*" **Tammy**

> "*To me it was a walk in the park, but I'm laid back, you know I'm not daft, not going to get involved with the wrong people, kept meself neutral*" **Janette**

Keeping busy was also a way to focus on something other than the situation and the events that lead to custody, as Naomi told me:

> "*I made myself a diary, they give you a distraction pack, there's colouring pencils, a pen, a notebook, dot-to-dot, there was a fidget thing, but I made myself a diary and I started it and I think I wrote in it religiously*" **Naomi**

Another major factor in providing emotional support, and also practical advice, were the staff, including both prison officers and other staff, such as family support workers:

> **"*There was always somebody there to talk to, the staff were okay really*" *Cheryl***

Other mothers, like Diane and Angela, spoke about the support groups and programmes they attended:

> "*They put us on the detox wing, they put us on that for two weeks and they did help us get off the drink like*" **Diane**

> "*They basically gave me therapy, on a regular basis, in a group environment, with other people with a similar sort of problem.*" **Angela**

There were therefore a range of coping mechanisms identified by the mothers with the most frequently expressed being friendships and camaraderie and support from staff. As outlined in **Section 7.2.1,** some women may have engaged in other coping strategies, such as drug use and self-harm may also have been engaged in, in an attempt to block out or deal with the extreme emotional impact of custody and separation from children. Chamberlen (2018) suggests that self-punishment, including regulation of food intake, as outlined in **Section 7.4.2** can be a means of coping. All of these coping strategies are an attempt to deal with the environment of the prison and its impact on the health and wellbeing of those residing there.

7.3 Family factors

Family factors relating to separation from children and the impact on family members are outlined in the following section. Previous research in this area has emphasised the added difficulties for women in prison, in terms of being removed from the family and the role of mother, as outlined in **Chapter 3**. However, such research has tended to focus on the impact on younger children, rather than those over the age of 18. Less research has been carried out to explore the impact on those caring for children. There is likely to be an interaction among the factors outlined in this section, with community level factors such as prison rules and procedures and individual factors such as women's resilience, support and ability to cope. Across this we can begin to see the intergenerational traumatic impact of maternal imprisonment and its far-reaching effect on mothers, children and in some cases grandparents. The following subsections will, in turn, examine separation from children, not being able to 'mother' and the impact on family members.

7.3.1 Separation from children

Previous research has identified the particular 'pains' of imprisonment for women (Crewe, 2017), particularly focusing on separation from children and from the mothering role (Baldwin, 2021; Celinska and Siegel, 2010; Haney, 2013; Lockwood, 2020). The removal of the role of primary carer has particular implications for women in prison and their ability to cope in the prison environment. However, in a significant number of cases, as discussed in **Chapter 5**, children have been removed prior to prison and prior to offending, with removal in some cases being a trigger for a downward spiral of offending and custodial sentences. In this sense, a lot may have happened in a woman's life before she ends up in custody, indicating that perhaps resources for earlier intervention and support need to be improved.

For five of the mothers in this research, their children were already in the care of someone else, prior to them going to prison or being involved with the criminal justice system. For instance, in Diane's case the children were with her sister under a special guardianship order due to her problems with alcohol. Likewise, Bianca's drinking had led to her mother being given care of her children. In Caitlin's case, she had signed over care of her daughter to her daughter's grandparents, as her mental health had deteriorated, and she did not feel able to cope at that time. Tammy's children had ended up in foster care due to her partner's abusive behaviour over a long period of time. Tammy had not felt able to leave the relationship before that point:

> "*When I lost the children, yeah, I had nothing else to lose, he didn't frighten us anymore, I started being violent towards him*" **Tammy**

As has been previously documented, for women who are mothers, the major pain of imprisonment is separation from their children. As described, this often happens unexpectedly and with little prior warning. It is also often the first-time mum has been apart from her children for any length of time, as Alicia told me:

> "*The hardest part was not seeing him, I've never been away from him ever, since the day he was born*" **Alicia**

Similarly, for Cheryl and Naomi, the trauma of separation was evident:

> "*I just got whipped away from him really, it wasn't expected*" **Cheryl**

> "*I couldn't look back at them, put it that way, I couldn't see their faces*" **Naomi**

As echoed by others, Tanya could not understand how she was being removed to prison as the primary carer for her son when her sentence was changed:

> "*Even though I was the one caring for him (son), I got sent away…so I just couldn't believe it, to me it was like I'm not here because of what I did, I'm here because he's (ex-partner) put us here*" **Tanya**

There is a palpable sense of fear of what will happen to the children without you, coupled with a sense of an inability to do anything to help which will be explored further in subsequent sections. The research uncovered some variability in how separation occurred. In some circumstances, the children were already under someone else's care as outlined above. In at least five other cases, children were not told about where mum was, or were told something else such as she was on holiday or working away. Kerry's son wanted to be at the court:

> *"He [son] was outside the court because he wanted to be there to say bye to us, just in case and then obviously coming in with me and then leaving without me was hard for him…."* **Kerry**

For those who had infants at the time of sentencing there was a wait to find out if they were eligible to be transferred to a Mother and Baby Unit (MBU) and decisions to make regarding this, as Kerry told me:

> "*My main concern was trying to get the baby in with me, and it did, it sent my mental health right downhill, I was scared in case she was going to forget me, she didn't know I was her mum or anything like that.*" **Kerry**

> **"Me: So your mum was looking after all three of your children?"**

> "*Yeah and then my son ended up going back with my mum, because my sister couldn't cope with him, and the baby eventually came in with me but with his ADHD, he and his sister fight and argue, so a social worker was involved and basically my son nearly went into care because my mum couldn't cope with him, so everyone had to kind of help a bit more than what they were and I had that worry as well, thinking, you know that they can't cope, he's going to end up in care, I'm not going to see him again.*" **Kerry**

This illustrates the struggles that families have on the outside to suddenly take on the care of children, in this case three, one of whom was a baby and one who had additional needs. The fact that Kerry's son nearly went into care was immensely stressful for all concerned. Some additional support for the family at this time would have been hugely beneficial.

Case 4: Kerry

Kerry was in her early 30's and was convicted of conspiracy to pervert the course of justice and producing cannabis. She had a 16-week-old baby and two other children at the time of sentencing. It was her first offence. Her partner was abusive towards her and was very controlling and threatening; she said that this led to the offence, as she was scared of him and his friends. Even once he was in prison, she did not feel safe as he knew people in the community that would intervene on his behalf.

Her mum took over her tenancy but struggled to look after her children while she was in prison, particularly her son who has ADHD. She already suffered from anxiety and depression and this got worse in prison, where she was placed on an ACCT. She was initially admitted to a women's prison without an MBU, and then had to wait to apply to be with her baby in an MBU, which took three months. Her main concerns were losing the bond with the baby, who she feared would forget who she was and the fact that her family were struggling with her other children who then became at risk of going into care. She was much happier once she was moved to the MBU at the open prison. She still feels the pain of the time that she lost with her children and which she cannot get back.

Another issue that was evident in a number of the interviews was that of 'broken bonds' of losing the special tie that a mother feels with her children, and of being forgotten by them. Previous research in this area, particularly coming from the field of psychology, has looked at mother-child attachment and the effect that separation has on this (Foster, 2012; Powell, Ciclitira and Marzano, 2017; Barnes and Stringer, 2014). This was not an issue confined to younger children: it was something that was felt by respondents with children of all ages, as Lisa and Kerry told me:

> "So*, I've lost, like, my son, in a way, which is horrible to say, but and I know I haven't in real terms but, emotionally I have, as I've lost that emotional connection with him which I always had*" **Lisa**

> "*Up until I got the baby in with me, but I had to wait quite a while for that, even though when I first went to prison, they said that it'll be a few weeks and we'll try and get you onto the mother and baby unit and it ended up being three months, so three months without my baby, it was awful, cos I suffer from anxiety and depression anyway, erm that kind of went downhill, I was put on an ACCT…..I was scared more that she thought that I'd left her, I think that's what messed with my head a bit, where she's gonna think, ah me mam didn't want me*" **Kerry**

As the interviews took place in the community, after the period of imprisonment, the women were able to reflect on the ongoing nature of the impact of the period of separation, this will be covered in the following chapter. Eight of the mothers were also having ongoing issues around child contact in some form. In some cases, this was complicated by the involvement of social services, adding another layer of difficulty to contact with children:

> *"I didn't want him to come and see me in jail, because of his age, basically he ended up living with his dad, I didn't get contact with him again until he was 16. I didn't see him 'cos social services and his dad didn't want me to have anything more to do with him, with me offence."* **Angela**

A frequently expressed pain of imprisonment, was that of missed time and missed milestones as cited by Arditti (2012b). Life was going on outside the prison gates and those inside it, were conscious of the major events in their children's lives that they were missing:

> "*I'm never going to get those, that year back, I'm never going to get the time that I lost with the baby back, never ever going to get any of it back anymore, I lost my house, I lost everything through it, I ended up being homeless.*" **Kerry**

> "*The worst part like I say is missing my children and that is heart wrenching and I wouldn't wish it on anybody, not that feeling and for them as well, I missed both of them had a birthday, and I missed Christmas, Christmas not so much, but their birthdays I missed, my oldest 21st I missed by two weeks, so it's times like that you can't get back.*" **Samantha**

> "*I missed the important birthdays, 21st, me 20 years of marriage, me anniversary, all the birthdays, I missed Christmas, Mother's Day…*" **Naomi**

> "*Not having his mum for Christmas, I think that really did hit him hard and his birthday cos I couldn't see him*" **Kerry**

Naomi, whose sons were 18 and 21 when she went to prison, expressed how her teenage sons had become adults while she was in custody and had to start doing things for themselves, that previously she had been doing for them:

> *"My husband had aged, me children weren't kids anymore, now I see they're grown adults; they're grown men.*" **Naomi**

In some ways this had forced her sons to be more independent, but it can be seen that for a younger child this may not be a positive development. Samantha spoke about

how her eldest son, aged 20 had gone into the army and now had a successful career path, whereas if she had not been in prison, she would not have allowed him to enlist in the first place due to being overprotective of him. There is little research around the impact of mum going to prison on older children; this is looked at in more detail in **Section 7.3.3**.

The loss of control over the family is a major impact for mothers. In terms of intergenerational trauma, the findings suggest that the impact of the prison has far reaching effects on children and families which cannot be mitigated against. There are differing effects for younger and older children, but in all cases the impact was sudden, distressing and detrimental to all involved.

7.3.2 Not being able to 'mother'

In some respects, it is possible that taking the mothering role away makes things easier for women on a daily basis, as someone else has to do all the hard graft of meals, school runs, personal care and so on. All those things women are used to doing every day stop and someone else has to do them, the responsibility is gone, it is someone else's. However, the feeling that you are unable to help, your hands are tied, and there is nothing you can do was described by many of the mothers as particularly difficult:

> "*It was heart-breaking on the phone, because you can't comfort them, you're stuck and that's what I said to my mum, when she used to ring me heartbroken, because she was worried about him – mum what can I do? Why are you putting this on me now?*" **Lisa**

> "*I couldn't help, I couldn't do anything to even help, I couldn't take him for a bit, I couldn't do anything and I think that feeling of being stuck and being helpless and not being able to help your son when you need to was just horrible.*" **Kerry**

Being removed from the role of mother can have devastating effects for both mothers and children, and as the data has already suggested, even a short period of separation can have long-lasting effects. Mothers talked about being the cornerstone of the family, the one who will sort things out, who is managing the home and school, and then that being taken away:

> "*Because I was like the one who, anything needed doing, X will do it, anything needs sorting, give her a ring and that was me, so and it's like all of a sudden none of them had that.*" **Lisa**

> "*There was one lady in there who used to ring home every day at 8 o'clock to make sure her husband had the children up, that food was done*" **Lisa**

This inability to mother was also directly related to the feeling that it was potentially harder for the family left on the outside who have to endure 'secondary prisonisation' (Comfort, 2008) or 'punishment drift' (Lippke, 2017). This will be explored further in the following section.

7.3.3   Impact on family members

> *"We hear it a lot, that the bairn's getting bullied because mum's in prison, and kids can be cruel."* **Probation Officer**

From the children and family's point of view, the impact of mum's imprisonment was far reaching, as both staff and women reported, reflecting previous research in this area (Booth, 2020b; Arditti, 2012b). Many of the mothers themselves acknowledged that their custodial sentence was in a sense harder for their children than it was for themselves; as they were removed from the situation and relatively safe in prison, they were not having to deal with stigma in the community or financial hardships in the same way. Naomi said:

> "*I was safe in where I was, I wasn't going anywhere, but they're in the big bad world aren't they? and they only had each other.*" **Naomi**

A voluntary sector worker also acknowledged this:

> "*The trauma for families going through that, where there is a family unit, I still worry about women, first time in custody, where I feel that it's not as bad as expected and they are removed, whereas families then have to get on with real life and the guilt and shame they will carry.*" **Voluntary Sector Worker**

The data is presented predominantly from the mother's perspectives, where they have observed and been informed of the impact of their sentence on their family members. The scope of the present research did not extend to speaking with family members directly.

In eight cases it was the women's mother (grandmother of the children) who took over care of the children; in another three cases it was the grandparents jointly. In six cases the father of the child took caring responsibility, although in one case the child later ended up in the care of social services. The next group most likely to take over care was a sister of the woman in prison, again showing how the burden of caring responsibility often falls on female members of families. This reflects previous

research, which shows that grandmothers and female relatives are more likely to take on care of children (Strozier *et al.*, 2011; Raikes, 2016).

As was to be expected the impact of a mother's imprisonment was vast, and severe. There was some variation in terms of how younger versus older children were affected. In many situations, the effects were also ongoing; this will be explored further in **Chapter 8**. Although children and young people themselves were not interviewed about their experiences, it was clear from what their mothers reported that the effects were significant. Some of the women said little about how their children were affected; to some extent this reflected their caring responsibilities, those whose children were not in their care prior to custody reported less impact on their children, and this may have been because they were just not aware of the impact. As this was a woman-focused research study, the primary viewpoint was that of the women, but further research would be beneficial investigating the impact on children and carers directly.

As would be expected, a range of experiences were reported, partly dependent on the age of the child, with different issues becoming apparent for different age groups. As one probation officer told me:

> "*So again they both had their mum in prison and both responded to it in completely different ways, little boy a lot more emotional whereas the young girl was, she closed down quite a bit. Was getting into quite a lot of trouble with other friends outside of school to the point where she's at risk of exclusion.*"
> **Probation Officer**

It was also identified that for those whose children had any kind of additional needs, for instance ADHD (see Kerry, **Case 4**), or autism (Danielle) allowances were not always made and these additional needs and their impacts were not always considered.

In this study, six of the mothers had a child who was aged over 18 at the time of their imprisonment. The research showed that although the impact on adult children was in some ways different, it was no less traumatic. Lockwood (2020) who has studied the effects of maternal imprisonment specifically on over- 18s, emphasises the significant role of mothering during the transition to adulthood. Particularly highlighted was the loss of participation in transitions and experiences of adult life. At times there was a feeling that older children were almost dismissed as being grown up, as if in some way it would not affect them so much. This became apparent when recruiting women for interview as one woman said "mine are grown up though" when I explained the criteria for women I was hoping to speak to. However, the data revealed great impacts for this age group, and this again is something that may warrant specific further study.

In Lisa's case, her imprisonment had a severe impact on her son, who was 18 years old at the time:

> "*He was just lashing out at other people, his anger manifested by him just, you know, exploding…They thought that they had lost him, they thought that he committed suicide, 'cos he'd threatened it and attempted it a couple of times after I went into prison, the first time he was found in the garage of his girlfriend's house with the hose in…*" **Lisa**

Lisa's son was physically violent towards his girlfriend. Lisa describes how her son felt no one was listening, no one understood, and no one was there for him. During this period, Lisa describes how she stopped eating in prison '*to punish herself*' and explains the difficulty and torment of knowing that her family outside desperately needed her help but being unable to do anything for them. A common thread in the narratives regarding older children also manifested as anger directed towards mum:

> "*He used to get cross with me and constantly ask me why? We didn't need you to buy all this stuff, you didn't need to do this…you've given us everything we wanted but I would have been happy living in a bedsit and you not going to prison.*" **Lisa**

Case 5: Lisa

Lisa is in her 40s and currently being supervised by probation following an 18-month prison sentence for fraud and using false documents. She was convicted for fraud related to tenancies of properties she and her partner took on. She has one son who is now 18, who was looked after by her mother while she was in prison. Lisa had been in a seven year relationship with her co-accused. Her relationship with her partner was abusive and controlling; she had sustained severe physical injuries from his abuse over many years including being thrown down the stairs by him. It later transpired that he was married, and that he was also bankrupt. He took his own life before the trial. Whilst awaiting sentencing, Lisa had been living out of her car and drinking heavily to cope with the events she was dealing with. Her son struggled greatly while she was in prison: he was very angry and aggressive and, at one point, attempted suicide. Lisa felt a great burden due to not being able to do anything to help whilst she was in prison, although she felt it was worse for those on the outside, who had to carry on with life. Lisa's mental health deteriorated whilst inside, and at one point she stopped eating. Her relationship with her mother was also placed under great strain by the experience.

One of Naomi's sons left the country to avoid having to see her go to prison, although she waited so long to be sentenced that he was back in the country by then. She told me:

> "*I know my son was hating us, I know he was hating us, didn't want to but you could, from looking back now, see it, he must've really hated us to go all the way to Australia, I had affected him…*" **Naomi**

In Angela's case (**see Case 1**) her imprisonment when her son was a baby led to a whole string of difficulties for her son and also for his children. Her son was cared for by his father initially but at age seven was put into social services care after he was caught shoplifting food as he was not being fed at home. At the time of interview, he was on probation, his two children were in social services care and his partner was in prison. Angela had never met her grandchildren due to her arson conviction. Her son had recently been housed in a notorious disadvantaged area and was struggling to cope. He also had a history of being physically abusive towards his mum. Angela had tried to get in touch with him over the years but had repeatedly been refused contact. Her son's father was abusive to her and was continuing to make threats on social media. The legacy of her single offence when severely unwell had followed her for her entire life, impacting her life, her son's and that of his children.

In Cheryl's case, imprisonment had left a lasting impact on her relationship with her son:

> "*Even though it was only seven weeks, it's still a really long time for a six year old and for a mother really to be without a child, I found it hard to forgive me for leaving him…he went to live with his dad when he was 11, I've just got a on/off relationship now really, I've got a grandson to him but I haven't got a nanna and grandmother relationship with him.*" **Cheryl**

Again, it can be seen how Cheryl's relationship with her grandchildren has also been affected by the short period in custody she endured. Danielle spoke predominantly about the severe impact on her daughter's behaviour:

> "*Bad, really bad, I don't know about her school, she was naughty at home, she didn't sleep by herself, she got into bed with my mam or lay on the settee until she fell asleep, and they carried her up.*" **Danielle**

Tammy and Kerry also noted behavioural changes in their children:

"Well, I think it affected the oldest one a lot, like I said, she started drinking every day and things like that," **Tammy**

"It had a really bad effect on him [son], cos he's always been close to me, so I think he had quite bad times in school and stuff like that, he did get excluded quite a few times due to his behaviour and stuff like that and it was all down to change and me being in prison." **Kerry**

This is concerning as exclusion from school has been shown to be a factor in future involvement with the criminal justice system (Holt, 2011); it shows how traumatic the experience of his mum's imprisonment was. Many of the mothers, particularly those who had care of their children, such as Kerry and Lisa, talked directly about how they felt the custodial sentence was harder for their children than it was for them:

"Him having to be shipped from house to house and losing everything and I think it was more harder for him." **Kerry**

"It's irreparable, because his mental health, to suffer to the extent where he tried to commit suicide several times, so he's done the sentence, if not a longer sentence, 'cos although I'm out of prison now, I feel like the damage that was done has, it's still just ongoing because we are so far apart now…My son was innocent, I might have been convicted, but they do the sentence with you, your children and your family do the sentence with you and that can't be right" **Lisa**

Family outside were the ones experiencing the disruption, stigma in the community, financial issues and loss of their parent; additionally, in some cases, younger children in particular were not told where that parent was or when they would be returning. Practitioners were also acutely aware of the ongoing intergenerational impact of maternal imprisonment:

"Also what it [maternal imprisonment] does is, it's and often people have a childhood trauma, its ensuring their children have a childhood trauma, so its stemming it from one person who could get help in the community to stemming it if they've got three or four kids, stemming it to three or four people who are maybe going to become an adult who needs support, like it's massive really." **Voluntary Sector Worker**

In a number of cases, women reported that the relationship with other members of their families had also been irreparably changed, particularly with their own mothers, who had typically been required to take over care of their grandchildren, as Cheryl told me:

> "*She found it all right, coping with me son, she was more devastated that, 'cos I'd never been in trouble before in me life.*" **Cheryl**

As well as the emotional impacts for carers, there were physical manifestations of the strain of the new responsibilities, as Lisa explained:

> "*My mum had a stroke, that was the very first stroke she'd ever had, the amount of strokes she had during my course of being in prison…*" **Lisa**

This related to guilt, shame and anger and translated into issues both during imprisonment and when respondents returned to the family. This was often closely related to housing issues, as in many cases mothers had moved into the family home and had been required to take over the tenancy. This will be covered in more detail in the next chapter.

7.4 Community and societal factors

Looking at wider, community factors from an ecological viewpoint, stigma and shame within the community was also acutely felt by the mothers: many cut themselves off from friends, work colleagues and other acquaintances. In some cases, no one came to support them on the day of sentencing, and no one visited them. This is a distinct contrast to male offending, which can hold less stigma, with their female partners often there holding everything together at home, supporting them and visiting frequently (Comfort, 2008). The greater shame and stigma for mothers meant this support, although wanted in many cases, was deemed not to be worth the negative repercussions of people knowing what had happened. Women seemed to internalise the idea that they were a bad person, rather than seeing their situation as due to external forces, for instance, being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Instead, there was a pervading sense of somehow deserving this, perhaps relating to low self-esteem and the impact of long-term abusive relationships.

In addition to the emotional impact of prison, there were also a number of wider concerns such as financial and practical issues that compounded the trauma for families:

> "*But it had a massive financial strain on my mum and my children, while I was in there, massive, because there's no help for them at all, you know my mum didn't get any benefits to help her raise my children*" **Samantha**

> "*I was one day over 13 weeks, and they wouldn't pay my rent, as I was just that one day over.*" **Danielle**

A probation officer outlined the stigma and difficulties for those taking on the care of children in the community:

> "*Her brother, he was in receipt of benefits and so because of like certain delays and issues he wasn't able to gain access to any additional funds to feed the children, so there was I think, he'd known somebody from a takeaway so they would get the food delivered just out of the goodness of their own heart and what he would do, he would pretend to pay, this is what he told us afterwards, he pretended to pay the delivery driver because he didn't want the children to see that they were getting like free food.*" **Probation Officer**

This section will firstly outline how prison rules and procedures add to the difficulties of mothers in prison, followed by an examination of the difficulties surrounding visits and the stigma experienced by criminalised mothers.

7.4.1 Prison procedures

In many respects, prison rules and procedures made things more difficult for women in prison, and there were certain rules which a number of the mothers talked about in detail. There were also rules which only affected a small number of people, which were often related to specific needs, for instance having a child with additional needs. These issues add to the carceral pains experienced by mothers in custody.

One mother who was interviewed was pregnant whilst in prison and three had young babies. The research uncovered issues with regard to accessing MBUs, with some confusion evident about how to go about accessing this resource. The issue remained, as Kerry says, that you had to make a choice between being with your baby and further away from your other children, or being closer to home but without your baby:

> "*The only mother and baby unit that they had was at X which was quite far from my family to even come and visit so it was kind of making a choice between having baby in with me and not being able to see my other kids as much, because obviously the travel*" **Kerry**

There was still a period of time, in some areas, where because the local prison did not have an MBU a period of separation was enforced, with someone else needing to look after the baby. Upon entering the prison system, individuals need to apply to move to an MBU, but there are certain rules and regulations about who is eligible and how to go about this (HMPPS, 2014). It is not a quick process and often involves moving to a prison which is further away therefore making it harder for family to visit you. There still appears to be a lack of available information for women about what the MBU is, and

how to go about accessing it (Birth Companions, 2016). This is something that could be easily rectified. Kerry told me her experiences of this:

> "*When I first went into prison they said it'll be a few weeks and we'll try and get you onto the mother and baby unit, and it ended up being three months, so three months without my baby, it was awful*" **Kerry**

> "*I always used to ask all the time, when am I getting shipped to this erm MBU? So then eventually I did and then I got [son] in there to finish me sentence.*" **Laura**

As with Kerry and Laura, Stacey received little information about the MBU: she also had to apply more than once, as her application got 'lost':

> "*I wasn't told about the MBU, I didn't know it was an option even. An officer found they had lost the form and I had to reapply. It took them 13 weeks to do my OASYS, hence the delay. They should have seen that my daughter was only young and told me about the MBU but nobody did.*" **Stacey**

Once Kerry was moved to the MBU, she became unwell, but was reluctant to tell anyone for fear of being separated from her daughter again:

> "*I was in a lot of pain, I didn't tell them straight away, cos I knew what was gonna happen, I knew they were gonna send her home and I didn't want that, I was scared they were not going to let her back in.*" **Kerry**

One of the women spoke about the indignity of being chained to a prison officer during hospital visits which adds to the trauma of prison, particularly for those who were pregnant. Bianca, who was pregnant and also had a broken leg at the time reported being chained up to attend the hospital:

> "*I was having to go to the hospital chained up for scans, that was horrible that bit and then I was having to go to the hospital chained up for my leg, chained up in front of everybody, that was the hardest bit of it, everyone just stares at ya.*" **Bianca**

It is clear how stigmatising this is and how it has the potential to further traumatise those who are already in a vulnerable state of mind. The accumulation of experiences such as this have the ability to combine to produce increasing problems for mothers who are struggling to survive in the prison environment.

7.4.2 Contact with outside

Reports from the mothers about the visits they received reflected previous research in which it is reported that many mothers in prison do not receive in person visits (Mignon and Ransford, 2012), and particularly not from children (Casey-Acevedo and Bakken, 2002) although data on this is not readily available. This situation is generally reversed for men in prison, with research showing that women frequently visit and support their male partners throughout their sentence (Comfort, 2008). The situation with visits is not as straightforward as it may seem at first glance. Although visits are extremely important for maintaining family relationships, they can also be traumatising for both mothers and children. Early in the research process it was brought to my attention by voluntary sector staff that visits and, in particular, family days at the local prison were not well attended. My research revealed that eight of the women received visits from their children, eight did not and two did not disclose this information. One had a baby who was in the MBU with her. Of those who did not receive visits, in five cases this was because they had not told the child where they were, and in three cases it was because the carer either did not want to bring them in, or to have any contact. This clearly illustrates the multiple barriers which may be present when it comes to visits. Other issues were voiced around distance, taking time off school, and children with additional needs. Again, the breakdown of relationships between women and the carer of their children comes to the fore as a major factor influencing whether or not visits occurred.

My research further uncovered that in many cases it was the women themselves who had not wanted to be visited. The mothers explained that, although they desperately wanted to see their child/children, they did not feel that it was in the best interest of the child. This was either because they did not want them to visit the prison and see it as a normal thing, or they did not want their child to see them in prison. In some cases it was because the carer of their children did not want to bring them to the prison.

> "*I didn't want anyone…I couldn't see anyone.*" **Linda**

> "*I didn't want them to come in there to see us, because of where it was.*" **Bianca**

> "*I said don't come if you're busy. I put a lot of pressure on myself, I didn't want to put any pressure on them, even though I wanted to see them.*" **Alison**

> "*one lady was speaking to me, it was her first time in prison she didn't really want to have her children visiting because she didn't want to have her children kind of know about prison and get used to going into prison and all that that entails, she still wanted prison to be quite a scary place that you go to, not*

somewhere like you can go and have a drink with your mam and have some sweets, it's a nice day out, but then also still needing to still maintain that contact with the children, so it was, she really struggled with it." **Probation Officer**

With older children, it was also reported that they found entering the prison difficult and upsetting, and so sometimes chose not to visit. The conflict of emotions about wanting and needing to see your child/children, but feeling that it would not be beneficial to them highlights the difficult decisions that women had to make:

"*They were quite scared, erm, me being in there and obviously seeing other people there and what went on and what goes on and then hearing people and their stories and stuff like that, and it's just, yeah not good, I would've kept them away if I could of, but I couldn't…watching them go was horrible.*" **Kerry**

These accounts show how the trauma of prison is also enacted on children's lives: they are forced to come into an alien, sometimes unwelcoming environment, or else not see their parent. Kinship carers also have to deal afterwards with the resultant emotional distress this can produce.

"*The very first visit I had with my son was horrendous, he cried, I mean even at his age, he cried, he had to go out of the visiting room at one stage, everybody was looking*" **Lisa**

Practitioners elaborated on these issues:

"*If you say, I don't want to see the bairn I don't want to have to bring them to prison because I don't want them to have to go through that, people will judge you as a bad mum, because you don't want to see your kids. But if you make the decision that, I want to see them, I need that, as my motivation to get me through this until I come out, that's a horrendous thing that you're putting your child through ultimately.*" **Probation Officer**

"*They feel like it's, they ask enough of their families anyway so they just don't want, sometimes they will say they don't want to be seen in that environment, but actually, underlying all that is the guilt and shame attached to their offending and not wanting to expose their families to that any more than they already have been."* **Voluntary Sector Worker**

Danielle voiced particular issues around visits as she had found them particularly difficult. Her daughter is autistic and was meant to go through the security screening

independently but found this hard because of her autism. This was a barrier to them having as many visits as they were entitled to:

> "*The time was put as unauthorised [at school], because she couldn't come on the Friday, because there was no one there to come in with her, so if she came in by herself, left at them doors to come to me, then, she wouldn't leave to go back, through them doors by herself and I wouldn't be allowed through them.*" **Danielle**

In some instances, other family members were the barrier to visits taking place. In Caitlin's case, the grandmother who was caring for her daughter was reported as saying:

> "*No there's no chance she's having contact, why would I want to bring a tiny child into a prison?*" **Caitlin**

Diane had similar experiences:

> "*Me sister wouldn't bring me daughter into a prison, so, plus I didn't blame her, it's me own fault for being there so.*" **Diane**

In some cases, adult family members also had issues around attending prison for visits:

> "*My brother never once came to see me in prison, because he actually said to me, we spoke about it and I said why did you never come and see me, you brought Mum all the time, he said 'cos I didn't want to see you in prison. I don't want to see my sister sitting with prisoners.*" **Lisa**

In summary, the narratives highlighted the many barriers to visits for women in prison that the research uncovered. Some of these were related to the rules enforced by the prison, some to the emotions and trauma related to the visits themselves, and some to the carers of their children and their views of visits. This reflects prior research in this area, as outlined in **Section 3.4.1** (Snyder, 2009; Booth, 2018). This research has uncovered the finding that, in many cases, mothers themselves did not wish to disclose their prison stay to children therefore the stigma of mothers in prison impacted on visiting. The following section will examine some of the issues with stigma encountered for mothers in prison.

7.4.3 Stigma, self-punishment and female deviance

The underlying concept of stigma was a recurring backdrop to the women's accounts and also something mentioned by both probation and voluntary sector staff. Staff were, in many cases, aware of the idea of 'double deviancy' (Heidensohn, 1989; Carlen, 2002) and the negative perceptions of women who have offended and particularly mothers. A member of staff recounted discussing this at the probation hubs session:

> "*We talked about 'double deviance' and the women were like, I didn't even know that was a thing, yes, because you haven't just broken the law you've broken some kind of moral conduct.*" **Voluntary Sector Worker**

The women themselves often had first-hand experience of this double standard, in terms of how they were perceived:

> "*Even though like her (daughter's) grandad's been to jail, I'm the worst human in the world because I've been to jail.*" **Caitlin**

In addition to their gender, pre-conceived ideas of what a prisoner was like were raised:

> "*a prison officer said, 'this is the minister for prisons', and I said, 'any interesting white papers at the moment going through etc.?' and he looked at me and looked at the officer and went, 'is she a prisoner?' And I said, 'you can address me' and he said, 'are you a prisoner?'*" **Lisa**

> "*Because I don't dress in a tracksuit, you know, I dress as I dress, and they [Prison Officers] said 'you're going to have to fit in more', and I said, 'well what should I look like?'*" **Linda**

Another theme that came to the fore, connected to emotional wellbeing, was that of 'needing to be punished' and expecting to be rejected by friends and family. This was closely tied to negative feelings of guilt and shame and also connected with self-harm (see **Section 7.2.2**). There were narratives regarding self-punishment in many of the women's accounts, which was perhaps related to the stigma of being a 'female offender' and a mother. This often came across as negative self-perception and self-disgust:

> "*I felt as though I needed punishing*" "*I found it hard to forgive me*" **Cheryl**

> "*I just felt so low, so down, so disgusted in meself*" **Naomi**

> "*because I punished myself I went down to 7st 8, when they put me on the scales I was like a skeleton, it was officer x said to me, I was layering up my jumpers, I had 2/3 pairs of trousers on one day, I mean this looked scrawny as*

anything I said, 'it's just me glands' we used to giggle about it, I was standing on the landing waiting to go to work one morning and he said, 'you don't think I've realised do you?' I said, 'what?' He said, 'how many layers of clothes you've got on.' I went 'well its bloody cold', he said, 'it's the middle of summer' he says, 'so what's going on?' I said to him, 'what's with the layers of clothes? Why are you losing so much weight what's going on? Are you being bullied? You're not taking any of the drugs or anything are you? You're not like that.' And I said to him – 'I've got problems at home officer.'" **Lisa**

Relating to a macro-level of ecological analysis, this reflects deeper societal views of women: that offending is in some way an unnatural activity for a mother to engage in. Family members also at times struggled with this; whereas if the person who had offended were a man, it would perhaps be seen as less serious, less offensive, less unusual and therefore more acceptable. The women were punishing themselves every day, by internalising their feelings, and often also drinking or using drugs or self-harm to cope, they were doing a great job of punishing themselves, even before the official punishment was enacted. This is consistent with previous research such as Chamberlen (2016), who describes how women in prison punish themselves by considering and contemplating their offending, resulting in feelings of guilt and disgust. Motz, Dennis and Aiyegbusi (2020) hypothesise that offending can itself be a form of self-punishment, to relieve feelings of guilt and shame. The concepts of stigma, shame and self-punishment will be revisited in the chapter on post-prison issues (**Section 8.4.2**).

7.5 Summary

This chapter has presented evidence from my research regarding the impact of the period of custody on mothers, children and other family members. It has shown how imprisonment affects mothers both personally, interacting with prior trauma they may have experienced, and on a family and wider societal basis. This has included mothers' descriptions of their initial experiences in custody and the negative effect this had on their mental health. Mothers also described the trauma of being separated from their children and being unable to do anything to help their families, resulting in feelings of guilt and shame.

The huge impact on everyone's lives, which many of the mothers described as worse for their family on the outside, appears to outweigh the severity of the crimes women were originally being punished for. Many of the women did not receive visits whilst in prison, or at least not from their children. In some cases, this was because they had not

told their children where they were, in others because they did not want their children to experience the environment of the prison. Women who had babies disclosed the difficulties of accessing a place in an MBU and the fear that they would lose the special bond between mother and child. One mother who was pregnant whilst in custody described the trauma of being chained to prison guards to attend hospital appointments.

Considering the intergenerational impact, which can be both physical and emotional with additional financial implications, we can begin to see the enduring legacy that prison can engender. Understanding this as the second traumatic phase, the next chapter will examine the third traumatic phase of maternal imprisonment, namely the post-release experiences of women.

Chapter 8: Reintegration and the lasting impact of imprisonment

8.1 Introduction

> "*Although I'm out of prison now, I feel like the damage that was done has, it's still just ongoing because we are so far apart now.*" **Lisa**

This chapter details the difficulties faced by women reintegrating into both their lives as mothers, their family relationships and their wider community after imprisonment. As the women interviewed for the research were spoken to after their period of imprisonment, they were able to reflect on the experience of prison and their journey through the criminal justice system. The post-prison period is the third phase of potential trauma for women who have experienced a prison sentence. This can be considered the most important phase, because if successful reintegration into the family and society do not occur, women will be more likely to re-offend and suffer further trauma (Arditti and Few, 2008).

The majority of the mothers spoken to were still struggling with some aspect of their rehabilitation and most felt that there was a lack of support for people coming out of prison. This included those who had recently left prison and those for whom custody was a long time past. The women's narratives corresponding to this phase also begin to show the lasting effects of imprisonment on both mothers and their wider families, showing the intergenerational traumatic impact of maternal imprisonment.

This third phase of trauma also particularly highlights the community and societal level factors that make rehabilitation difficult for all prisoners. These interact with family and personal history factors to cause long-lasting difficulties in some cases. The first section of this chapter looks at initial reactions to coming out of custody and then goes on to look at the family, community and societal factors that relate to this. Even for those women who had not experienced significant prior trauma, the re-entry into life after prison was often a very difficult period.

8.2 Individual factors

Individual factors relating to reintegration into life after custody are outlined below. This includes initial reactions to leaving prison and emotional wellbeing during this period. The majority of mothers were spoken to within 6 months to a year of release from custody, although one respondent was spoken to 5 years on and 5 had been in custody around 20 years before. As all but one of the women were currently being supervised by the CRC, for those who had been released within the past year this was generally under the new post-release supervision arrangements (UK Parliament,

2014). So they had initially been released on electronic tag (some were still on tag), if there was a suitable address for them to be registered to, and were then expected to attend probation appointments until a year post-release. For those who had been in custody further in the past they were being supervised by the CRC due to new offences that they had committed. Prior research has outlined the experiences of caregivers (Booth, 2020b), mothers who have experienced first short sentences (Masson, 2019), and analysed experiences from an individual maternal perspective (Baldwin, 2021). This research uses a wide-ranging definition of trauma to connect the individual, familial and social impacts of maternal imprisonment on post-release experiences.

8.2.1 Coming out; initial reactions

Two of the mothers had been out of prison for only a week or so whereas others were further along their journey back into the community, varying from weeks and months to years (6mths, n=4, 1year, n=7, 5years, n=1, 20 years, n=5). Although it is easy to assume that release from custody would be an exhilarating, happy moment, feelings were much more mixed than this and, in some cases, quite the opposite. Previous research such as by Masson (2019) and Baldwin (2021) has highlighted the emotional difficulties for mothers post-release. Many women really struggled in the first few weeks and beyond, they described it as '*bizarre*' with '*everything moving too fast*' illustrating the sensory impact. At least three of the women spoke about feeling they wanted to be back in prison, and these were not repeat offenders or women with specific housing issues, they just found the sudden change in environment hard to cope with. They were not prepared for feeling like they did, as they felt that they should be feeling elated and relieved:

> "*Sometimes I just think, god! I just want to be back in that little room, do you know what I mean? Just because it's a bit comfort, that's what it's like because you are so used to it.*" **Alicia**

> "*Somehow you feel guilty for the people you've left behind, because you're thinking, here I am, nice food, glass of wine. It was just bizarre.*" **Linda**

> "*Nothing can prepare you for coming home, it cannot and it's hard, coming back out is hard.*" **Samantha**

There was also a feeling of loss and abandonment; after having been closely monitored inside the prison, suddenly you are on your own:

> "*When I came out, I felt as though you were just let out and no one cared, because I didn't have a problem with drugs or alcohol, because I had a family to*

> *go to it was kind of like off you go, you're on your own, and I feel that's very wrong, as much as I would say I don't have sort of mental health issues, I'm quite level headed, for that four weeks adjusting, if it wasn't for my children I would have quite happily said, because I came out on tag, HDC [Home Detention Curfew] and for that first four weeks, if I was coming out on my own I would've said, 'take the tag off and let me go back'.*" **Samantha**

> "*The first day you come out, they give you your clothes in a black bag, like a black holdall, nylon thing, they give you whatever money you've got left in your canteen account and they give you 27 pounds or 30 pounds something like that[2], even if you've not got anything in your canteen.*" **Lisa**

For Caitlin, being on her own in an empty flat with just a television, was too much to bear and she ended up being recalled to prison:

> "*I didn't want to go back to jail, but it was honestly better than sitting on me own in the house for that long, like it was 13 weeks I had to sit in the house on me own.*" **Caitlin**

This illustrates the problems around releasing women from prison to little support and expecting them to cope on their own. Caitlin was relatively young (22) and her partner was himself in prison when she was initially released on tag, so she was going out to live on her own. Others were concerned about the potential reactions of people in the community to their release, or their perceptions of this, as Samantha described:

> "You *just felt on your own, I felt as though all the neighbours were looking when I came out of the house, walking down the street, I wouldn't walk down the street on my own in case I bumped into anyone*." **Samantha**

Cheryl told me how she found herself mixing with a different peer group, that she now felt more comfortable with:

> "*I didn't tell anybody I was getting out; I just got the bus home. I was like in that stigma, where I'd been to jail, felt like people looked at us different, probably didn't, but I felt that I found it harder to communicate with normal people as such, that's how I ended up stopping in with the other people who were around crime.*" **Cheryl**

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[2] The actual amount at the time of interview was £46 but increased to £76 in the summer of 2021.

Case 6: Samantha

Samantha was sentenced to 42 months for fraud through employment and was the single parent of two children aged 20 and 14. She said there was a massive financial strain on her mum and the boys while she was in prison. Her mum moved into the family home and took over her tenancy in order to look after her boys. Her relationship with her mother suffered immense strain due to the events surrounding her offence and prison sentence. Her sons had asked her why she committed the offence and, said they did not need all the material goods she bought for them, which made her reconsider what is important in life.

The stigma of having been in prison had a big effect on her, and afterwards she had little contact with friends and colleagues from before she went to prison. She still felt a lot of guilt and shame about the events. On leaving prison she applied for 132 jobs before being successful in gaining employment. She did not feel there was much support available coming out of prison; it seemed that women were just left to get on with it as if nothing had happened. She had difficulty moving back into the role of parent due to conflict with her mother who had taken on this role in her absence.

Staff were also aware of the difficulties faced by women leaving prison. They told me about how drug dealers and pimps would be waiting for women at the bus stop outside the prison, and how hard this made it for some women to avoid returning to activities they had engaged in before:

> "*So as soon as the women are out, within 20 seconds they're offered drugs, and because, initially, they [dealers] were on prison grounds, that was addressed and stopped, now they're standing at the bus stop, where the women have to get the bus, you can't, so they're not on private property, so the prison can't move them and the police are saying, 'we don't know that they are [dealing]', and there's different people, so as soon as they're out of custody they're often met by drug dealers.*" **Probation Officer**

For the mothers, there was also a sense of the sensory and environmental change being difficult to take. What used to be home does not feel like home anymore, and some women were haunted by the sounds of the prison environment:

> "*Everything feels surreal, it's like you're on another planet and then you come home and you're going to sit in your own house where you used to sit, but you're going to feel like an outsider and you don't feel part of anything and maybe that's part of the whole punishment*" **Samantha**

> "*I can still hear the keys going in the doors and the gates, metal bars and everything going*" **Danielle**

Having had to get used to sleeping in a noisy environment with lights on and checks through the night, Alicia found sleeping at home difficult to get used to:

> "*I mean, obviously, I love being out and you love being home and you want to be out but then there's like every now and then, and like I can't sleep, I can't sleep every night, I think I've had one night's sleep since I've been out, yeah, I just keep waking up and me heart's racing because of me anxiety and then I can't get back to sleep and it's just really strange, I'm hoping that's just going to stop soon!*" **Alicia**

The loss of the fixed routine of being told what to do, when to do it and when to stop doing it was also a big change for Alicia and Naomi:

> "*I feel like I've been away a lot longer than I was, because you just get so used to your little routine, like the same people, you see the same faces, you do the same thing every single hour of every single day and it's just weird coming out and like just going back home, back to me home, back to seeing me son, like getting into his like school routine and not seeing the same people that you always see, I don't know it's really hard to explain, a few people have asked us, but I just can't explain the feeling it's just weird, I don't know, I can't explain it, it's strange.*" **Alicia**

> "*When you're given that big openness, it's wooooh hey, don't be giving me this aye, yeah 'cos then you get, you do rely upon someone telling you what to do, what you're doing and how to do it.*" **Naomi**

Practitioners suggested this was an issue for a number of women:

> "*I would say the biggest issue for me is lack of routine, so they seem to enjoy the routine or knowing what's happening in prison, this happens at a time, they like the order and maybe that's the first time that they've had that in their lives so that need for routine. We're told children need routine but actually we forget that sometimes actually adults need routine too.*" **Voluntary Sector Worker**

The extracts above outline some of the many different issues that mothers face when re-entering the community after a period of imprisonment. In this cohort, some of the women had been in prison for a number of years and others a number of weeks, but all found the transition from prison to the community harder than they were anticipating. Alongside the emotional aspects of release, there were several practical issues voiced, which will be analysed in the following sections. For these mothers, another major aspect was reuniting with their children, where this was possible, and also taking back responsibility for the mothering role from whoever had been taking care of their children in their absence. Again, as will be outlined in the following section, this generated a lot of mixed and sometimes unexpected emotions.

8.2.2 Emotional wellbeing

Many of the women spoke about issues with their mental health and emotional wellbeing since coming out of custody. In many cases this had a significant effect on their day to day lives and impacted on their ability to re-engage with family and community. Six of the women spoke about particular issues with anxiety after prison, such as Danielle:

> "*When I came out, I started like, having panic attacks and that, so probably it's just from being in there really, isn't it?*" **Danielle**

In some cases, it manifested as social anxiety related to potential stigma about their offence and media coverage, such as for Lisa and Alison:

> "*I do have social anxiety disorders, I don't like coming out, like coming here today, I'm like, I think everybody's looking at me, because I was all over the papers, I was all over the local paper and the nationals,*" **Lisa**

> "*Well, I've never been out of work previously. Now I have anxiety, paranoia - mostly from the press coverage, do people know who I am? Walking down the street, the press has been a big part of it, it doesn't go away, it's a case of forcing myself to face things everyday.*" **Alison**

Neither Lisa nor Alison had experienced issues with anxiety before going into custody, so they did not have coping mechanisms to deal with these feelings. Danielle, was also really struggling with her anxiety:

> "*I've got anxiety myself, I never had it when I went in, I was fine, literally I've got, I get dropped off at these doors and then I come out and they're there to pick us up, I just don't go anywhere so it is bad.*" **Danielle**

164

There was a surprising commonality to these accounts, particularly as women were not specifically asked questions about their current mental health. At least three of the mothers, (Danielle, Alison and Lisa as illustrated above) were having difficulties leaving the house and carrying out daily activities. They had to be taken to appointments and picked up afterwards as they found they could not now cope with independent travel. It appeared they were not prepared for how difficult release would be, and how different they might feel compared to before they went in. As Lisa summed it up:

"*being in prison, yeah, it ruins a person.*" **Lisa**

Samantha expressed feelings of extreme guilt about her past actions and what she felt she had put her family through:

"*You put on a brave face and you tell everyone, 'everything's fine' when deep down you know you're feeling as guilty as anything about it all, sometimes I'll just sit on a night and look at, say, my youngest or even when my oldest is at home, you look at them and it just eats you up, but I would never let them know that.*" **Samantha**

The mothers' experiences illustrate the continuing trauma inflicted by prison on this cohort of mothers. Even after release they were experiencing sensory flashbacks and, emotional difficulties, and this impacted on their ability to re-enter their families and communities successfully. The trauma of prison crept into many aspects of their lives thereafter. Alicia described how she felt that she was not the same person as before prison:

"*I think that's why I just sit down and just sit back and I'm quite quiet, cos I'm quite an outgoing person, but I don't know, I feel like I'm not that person anymore, do you know what I mean?*" **Alicia**

For some of the mothers, there was also the reappearance of the risk of domestic abuse once they returned to the community. This included threats from ex-partners on social media, as Angela told me:

"*Yes, well, his dad's currently put something on Facebook, which is rather rude, an old-fashioned gravestone with my name on it 'RIP', that's nice, isn't it? I thought basically I could report that if I wanted to.*" **Angela**

Some women felt that they were not safe, as Kerry described, even though her ex-partner was himself in prison:

"*Just cos he's in prison, doesn't mean I'm safe, it doesn't mean that I get to walk away and live my life, it doesn't mean that all this happens, just because he's gone to prison, it's not that easy, not at all.*" **Kerry**

Kerry was concerned that she may be at risk from the family and friends of her ex or others involved in the offence who may try to exact revenge on her for telling what had happened. This illustrates how many women might be re-entering unsafe situations in the community due to ongoing IPV, as well as having to cope with numerous other practical and emotional issues.

8.3 Family factors

8.3.1 Reuniting with children

For mothers coming out of prison, in many cases their first main concern was regaining contact with their children. Previous research has outlined some of the difficulties that mothers may experience, such as parenting conflict and regaining trust (Brown and Bloom, 2009; Bachman *et al.*, 2016). This was not always easy. The current system means that in order for children to come back and live with you, appropriate housing is required, which is not easy to come by as many women have lost their homes whilst inside prison, as Janette found:

"*I haven't got them back because I haven't got a property…I still cry now going to sleep because I haven't got me four-year-old, she slept with me every single night*" **Janette**

Issues with housing will be further addressed in **Section 8.4.1**. Without a suitable address you cannot be released on Home Detention Curfew (HDC) or tag, so for some women the lack of suitable address to be tagged to was an issue that would ultimately extend their time spent in prison. As Tammy explained, social services may require parents to show that they are capable of having their children back in their care:

"*Well me oldest, 17 year old, she's still in foster care at the moment, we're having a bit issues, she's having a bit issues, I think it's because I'm out, she wants to come back home and stuff like that, but she's got to realise that I've only been out five month, so things are still, I've still got to prove myself to them [Social Services] and then when me partner gets out, she's got to prove herself as well before we can actually have her living with us.*" **Tammy**

Caitlin (see **Case 3, p.137**), who had given care of her daughter to her ex-partner's parents, was faced with the prospect of going through the family courts to get contact with her daughter:

> "*He [partner] wants contact with his son, I want contact with me daughter, he doesn't wanna have to go through the court and neither do I, like I would much rather not go through court, but I've tried and I'll have to go through it and they're having none of it, they're saying it's my fault, which I completely know it's my fault I haven't seen my daughter, but they could at least give me the chance again.*" **Caitlin**

The emotional strain, for Caitlin, of going through this process alongside the other problems experienced on leaving prison was overwhelming. There appeared to be little support, either practical or emotional, to assist with this. For those who were able to have contact with their children on release, there were other difficulties that arose. For instance, Diane found it hard explaining to her daughter where she had been and why she was back:

> "*I found it really hard actually, because me daughter, she's seven now, so she knows the score, you know what I mean, she was asking questions, 'how have you been on holiday so long?' And stuff like that.*" **Diane**

Alicia, also had some awkward questions to answer as her son did not know she had been in prison:

> "*Especially now I'm on tag so he's only noticed once, like I've managed to keep it quite hidden but then he spotted it the other day, he says, 'what's that mummy?' So we had a few little questions about the tag and obviously I've got the box in the house, so he was asking what that was and explained that you can't touch it and you can't press the buttons, but that's fine, I think it just went over his head really once he's asked that one initial question then that's it, he's been ok.*" **Alicia**

For younger children, such as Diane's and Alicia's it was likely they had not been told where mum had been whilst in prison. However, as shown in the comments, above this then added extra problems on release, when they wanted to know from mum where she had been and so on. Another difficulty that mothers identified, concerned finding a space in which to cope with their own emotions without it impacting on their children too greatly, as Linda described:

> "*I'd take X [daughter] to school and then go back home and sit and cry, get ready to pick her up from school. It was just awful.*" **Linda**

In some cases, although women were able to have contact with their children immediately upon being released, their children were not initially ready for another change in their living circumstances, as Alicia told me:

> "*He [son] did have one night where he just stayed there [at Grandma's] and he went 'mummy, I don't really want to stay at home just yet', but I just let him go with it, I says 'whatever you want to do, whenever you want to come home', like I'm not gonna force him back into that when he's been used to that routine for so long.*" **Alicia**

For others such as Alison and Cheryl, this was a more permanent situation, echoing Arditti (2012b), where the relationship between mother and child had been irrevocably changed by the period of separation:

> "*The children were settled with their grandad and have actually decided to stay there. I had been renting so my house went, I'm renting again now but I still haven't got the kids back.*" **Alison**

> "*He went to live with his dad when he was 11, like I lost the bond I had with him…I dunno I just couldn't seem to get back to that, like even though it was only seven weeks, it was still like seven weeks is a long time for a six-year-old and for a mother really to be without a child, like I just, I found it hard to forgive me for leaving him.*" **Cheryl**

There is an issue highlighted here around the need for help with the transition from prison to being a full-time parent again and how to manage the emotions and difficulties involved. Danielle reflected on the ongoing nature of the impact of the period of separation on her relationship with her daughter:

> "*The bond I had with my little girl before I went in was unbreakable, now she's really distant, this prison sentence made my child distant from us…It's still not right, she used to tell us stuff, she used to tell us everything but now not so, she doesn't even like us taking her to school or pick her up now so…she's not like the same as she was before I went in*" **Danielle**

Lisa and Caitlin also felt there had been permanent changes to their relationships with their children:

> "*I used to say that to my mum when I first came out of prison, 'mum, why doesn't he talk to me anymore? Why is he not here? Why has he decided to go and move in with his girlfriend?'*" **Lisa**

> "*She'd been calling her grandma 'mam' and they hadn't been correcting her and it really upset us, 'where's mam?' and she'd point at her grandma.*" **Caitlin**

This illustrates the traumatic intergenerational impact of the imprisonment of mothers. This is not something that can be simply reversed on release, so that everything will be resolved. The permanent changes to relationships, caused by the period of separation can have ongoing impacts for all concerned. Lisa described the changes she observed in her son and his behaviour towards her:

> "*He has anger towards me, real anger, angry at people, he just seems to be angry at the world, which is horrible to say isn't it?... sometimes he's very disappointed in me, but I don't know whether it's disappointment or I just can't work it out, it breaks the illusion, doesn't it? I think it made him feel unsafe, that is something he used to say to me, it's like death for the first time.*" **Lisa**

The sense that the damage was done and could not be changed, was something highlighted by a number of the women:

> "*Although I'm out of prison now, I feel like the damage that was done has, it's just still ongoing because we are so far apart now.*" **Lisa**

> "*It's a punishment for a lifetime… because you're never going to get that time back. Ever. I think they really need to realise what effect it has on children not on the mums, it's more the children.*" **Kerry**

There was a sense that these changes were in many cases ongoing, echoing research by Arditti (2012b). Linda's daughter was still angry many years later:

> "*Bitterness terribly, even now, you know, 'why didn't you tell me? Why did you do it?' We were arguing once and it'd be something stupid we'd be arguing about, but whatever I mean she's 29 now and it was like 'do you know what it's like to have a mam in prison?'*" **Linda**

For many families there was also the lingering fear that mum would go away again, that if it can happen once, it can happen again. Kerry told me:

> "*The way he [son] feels is, anything could just take me away from him now, cos it's happened and he didn't expect it happening, no one did really…I'm scared*

to do anything really in case, anything can happen to send you back to jail, it's quite scary so yeah, it's just taking each day as it comes, until obviously I get used to the fact that yes you're going to be okay, you're not going to go to jail, you'll be fine." **Kerry**

In some cases older children, who were likely to understand the requirements of being on tag, had anxieties around this, as Naomi described:

"*My son recorded it on his phone of them cutting the tag off and his face was such a picture! Just, it was like a birthday present or a Christmas present to him. He was, I think, more pleased than me, because I think he got frightened as well, in case I slipped out or like went out and broke my curfew or anything, because he just did not want me back inside so he was on tenterhooks, you could see.*" **Naomi**

The narrative extracts presented here clearly show the ongoing impact of the period of imprisonment on mothers and their families. This includes changes to relationships and behaviour, living arrangements and anxieties about what the future holds. There is a sense that there have been irrevocable changes to individuals. **Chapter 7** alluded to the changes to sense of self that mothers encountered, and here it can also be seen that wider family members also experienced this. In general, research has focused on prior issues and the deprivations of the period of imprisonment itself; much less has been written about the ongoing legacy of imprisonment, particularly for mothers.

8.3.2 Becoming mum again

"*You lose lots of rights when you go to prison, but I don't think the right that you should lose is the right to be a mum*" **Kerry**

Another major aspect of returning to the community that was identified as difficult, was that of re-entering the role of mother. Baldwin (2017) has described the impact of prison on maternal identity, role and maternal emotions using what she terms a 'matricentric feminist' approach. This re-entry caused difficulties to a number of mothers, and was also something practitioners were aware of:

"*Her mother had been looking after the two eldest, and all of a sudden K comes out and it's two mothers telling the kids, and they've both got different parenting skills and that causes friction.*" **Probation Officer**

"*Also dealing with what your children's reaction's gonna be to you being away, actually how to manage that if you are kind of explaining where you've been*

and the children being resentful of that, being angry about that, so or even just angry about the fact that you've not been there, but maybe they can't verbalise that, and it comes out in different ways, you know it might come out in more challenging behaviour, so it's actually then how the parent then deals with perhaps a change in their child's behaviour that wasn't present before they went into prison, I know there was an example as well where the grandparents' kind of attitude towards everything changed when the daughter went into prison, because they'd had to take over the care it was almost like they were still feeling the need to do that once mam came out of prison, so there was a lot of conflict between mam and grandparents, it's like, 'yeah I'm out of prison now I can carry on being mam', but it's like they couldn't kind of let go and still felt the need to take overall responsibility for the children." **Probation Officer**

Samantha, in particular, had issues around going back to being mum:

"I wanted to just step in and be mum again and my son wanted me to step in and be mum again, but I was stepping on my mum's toes, she'd taken over for 10 months you know, little things, you'd get comments, if one day I'd cooked the tea and whatever, she'd be like 'why have you done that?'" **Samantha**

Part of regaining the mothering role, involved the delicate issue of whoever had been caring for the children transferring out of that role to some extent, as described by Harm and Phillips (2001). This was not always an easy transition and, in some cases, led to irreparable damage to the mother/daughter relationship between the women and their own mothers. Children were sometimes stuck in the middle of this, trying to appease both 'mothers' as Kerry and Samantha explained:

"I loved it because I had that back, but at the same time it was kind of hard because, he was kind of used to me mam's rules, and then back to mine, erm, so it was kind of trying to juggle that and being in someone else's home, as well as not being in your own home and having your own rules and stuff like that, it was hard." **Kerry**

"and I think sometimes my youngest feels a bit torn cos he'll say exactly the same 'it's like it's a competition' and I'm like 'it's not a competition' it's me just saying 'you know grandma's sitting there saying how tired she is and how she hates living in that house and how she wants to be in her own place' so I'm saying 'well I'll do this' and then you're sort of being pulled for it and I'm a 47

year old woman and sometimes if feel like a 15 year old school kid because you can't do right for doing wrong, that's the, I would say that apart from missing the children that's' the worst part. 'Cos she won't let it go. There's only so many times you can say 'thank you' and she'll say 'I don't want a thank you from you because I've had to do it, they're my grandchildren'." **Samantha**

Stacey's mum applied to permanently take over care of her daughter from her:

"*Mum had changed, she didn't want to hand my daughter back, she made up fictitious lies and got social services involved…three weeks before I came out my mum tried to get a child arrangement order for my daughter, so that she could have her.*" **Stacey**

This understandably led to problems with their relationship, which was a common theme, as will be discussed in the next section.

8.3.3 Relationship with carer and family trauma

"*Our relationship will never be the same, the relationship, I've kind of got with my mum, is gone really*" **Samantha**

There has been little research which has investigated the impact on the relationship between the kinship carer and the individual who has served a custodial sentence (see **Section 3.5.2**). The research that does exist has centred on the impact on kinship carers rather than the effect on the relationship between the carer and the mother who has been in prison (Raikes, 2016; Young and Smith, 2000; Hairston, 2003; Booth, 2020b). The findings from this research, however, indicated that this was a site of major change within the family, illustrating the wide-reaching intergenerational impact of maternal imprisonment. The strain enacted on the relationship between mother and daughter was often too great for the relationship to return to how it was before. For what were generally older women, the physical and emotional impact of caring for children and being responsible for visiting the person detained was also difficult:

"*When you say sorry, I mean I've stopped saying it, I stopped saying it three or four months into my sentence because every time I said, 'look mum I'm sorry', she's like, doesn't cut it…every time anything goes wrong, or if she's having a bad day, it's all my fault, you know, she'll say, 'I'm not going to meet my friends for coffee, I'm too ashamed of you', so I'm constantly getting that*" **Samantha**

"*When I was in visits one day my mum came in, she looked at me and I said, 'you know mum it's terrible what some of the girls have been through in here'*

and she says, 'what do you think you've been through? Look at what x has been through, look at what we've all been through'" **Lisa**

It must be remembered that many of the kinship carers, who were predominantly grandmothers taking over care, had had a lot to cope with whilst their daughters were in prison. Stigma from the community, financial issues, and taking care of grandchildren full time, as detailed by previous research (Bachman and Chase-Lansdale, 2005). In many cases this also impacted on their physical health:

"*My mum is 70 now, so she was 68 when it started, it has had an impact on her health*" **Samantha**

"*When I first came out of prison, in the November and I went to the local shops, where my mum is, there's an Iceland and I went in and the store manager said, 'it's taken it out of your mum', and I said 'yeah I know, she's really aged, hasn't she?'...I believe that this killed her, I really do, because me going to prison was so horrific for her.*" **Lisa**

Many of the women, such as Angela, spoke about the wide-ranging impact their custodial sentence had on the family. In some cases, this related to family offending:

"*He's [son] now in trouble himself, he's on probation himself, hopefully he'll get some help and go back to his mechanics course, I'm encouraging him to do that and try to keep him out of jail, stop him repeating, basically my mistakes.*" **Angela**

There was also the stigmatising impact of the mother's sentence, in some cases meaning that they were not allowed to have contact with children and grandchildren:

"*He's (son) now got two children of his own, also now in social services care, one's been adopted, one he can still see, so he finds that difficult, I've never met me first grandson, I haven't met me granddaughter yet, cos social services, still cos of what happened twenty years ago, when I went to jail, they've still blocked me seeing my granddaughter now*" **Angela**

This was particularly difficult in Angela's case as her original sentence was for arson, when her young son was in the house:

"*Every time his partner has a kid, or two ex-partners now, are you still in contact with your mother? We don't believe she's safe. It was 20 years ago. Get over it. It's not the same anymore, I've moved on, I've grown up, I've got the support I*

need now, try listening rather than stigmatising, come round, look at the house, talk to me, don't assume." **Angela**

Cheryl also felt that her time in prison and separation from her son had a lasting impact which had now also affected her relationship with her son's children:

"*I've got a grandson and that like to him, but like I haven't even got a nanna and grandmother relationship with him.*" **Cheryl**

Caitlin was aware of the stigma of being in prison and her connection with that, but was determined to stop that being passed on to her child:

"*Because it used to be a men's jail and me dad had been there, his sister's been there and now I've been there, so he (dad) turned round and he was like 'it's one family tradition that isn't going to be broken', I was like 'it's getting broken now, I'm not, none of my kids are coming here'*" **Caitlin**

The experiences presented above begin to show the enduring impact of maternal imprisonment on mothers themselves, and also their families. These problems were added to the prior traumatic experiences that women and families had experienced, often with little support to overcome them. In many cases the changes to relationships within the family were permanent and these scars added to mothers' feelings of guilt, shame and worthlessness. The wider traumas experienced by the family were also compounded by other structural and systemic factors, as outlined in the following section.

8.4 Community and societal factors

8.4.1 Housing and financial issues

"*Housing needs to be addressed hugely, especially for women that are institutionalised, stepping out of that door on day one is terrifying, so to have some support there, accommodation, finances sorry that needs to be looked into with the new universal credit claim that's a nightmare, getting people to understand the process with that, because you can wait up to six weeks before your first proper payment and what do women do for six weeks?*" **Probation Officer**

As illustrated by the quote above, housing was a major area of difficulty for women exiting the prison system. The Female Offender Strategy states that 39% of women are released into 'unsettled' accommodation and 18% are released homeless (Ministry of Justice, 2018a). Other previous research such as Masson (2019) has detailed the

difficulties mothers leaving prison may experience, such as unsuitable accommodation and issues with securing accommodation for themselves and their children. Practitioners, in particular, expressed how they continually encountered difficulties trying to house women in appropriate accommodation post-custody. Stable, safe housing is a necessity for anyone to rebuild their life, but unfortunately this was often lacking and this impacted on the possibility of reunification with children (see **Section 8.3.1**), employment and good mental health. Sometimes women were housed a long way from their home authority, particularly if they were allocated bail, accommodation and support service (BASS) accommodation:

> "*Most of my women haven't gone down that route (BASS) because it's not something I would encourage, erm, BASS is great if you want an out and you've got a lot of support and you've got a lot of internal confidence and things, to place a vulnerable woman in a city they've never known, on their own with no support really, 'cos they get an hour a week of support maybe, even though it's supported, is quite a daunting thing for a woman, especially when they've just come from that environment where they've got people around them all the time,"* **Probation Officer**

Practitioners described how women agreeing to be sent to BASS accommodation could be sent anywhere in the country, with no knowledge of the area, no support from friends and family, and often being allocated to unsuitable accommodation. Even women who were not taking this option were often sent to mixed sex hostels on leaving prison, in difficult locations in line with previous research (Gorden *et al.*, 2020), for those who ended up in hostels it was often not an easy start to life on the outside:

> "*You're kind of dumped and that's it, okay get on with it, come out and end up in hostels and the hostels are awful. The hostels are rife with drugs, absolutely awful so they're coming out they're just right 'get on with it now' then they re-offend, and they go back."* **Probation Officer**

Angela and Tammy both experienced hostels on release:

> "*I ended up in a bail hostel a mixed hostel, a lot of drugs, a lot of alcohol, a lot of violence, a lot of men.*" **Angela**

> "*Yes, well, all of them are drinkers, and I was ex-alcoholic, placed with loads of alcoholics! Yes, I could've easy gone back down that road again, but I chose not to.*" **Tammy**

For women who have often already experienced intimate partner violence, or sexual

violence such as Angela and Tammy, being in a mixed sex-hostel was often another traumatising aspect of release from prison. Practitioners were acutely aware that they were often placing women in unsuitable accommodation, but there was often little choice:

> "*I had one woman, it took me over ten months to get her accommodation she was living, sofa surfing, it was awful, council wouldn't touch her.*" **Probation Officer**

The nature of the offence the woman had committed often added to problems with finding accommodation. In particular, Angela, whose offence related to arson, encountered this difficulty:

> "*As soon as people hear the word arson, that's it, they don't look at the background of it.*" **Angela**

Combined with lack of funds, this compounded the problems for women leaving custody as a probation officer explained to me:

> "*So then you've got a female coming out that's staying with a friend, so they won't get council accommodation due to the nature of their offence. Well, you won't get council accommodation, anybody that's offended. So then it's private accommodation, isn't it? but then you need at least 1500 pounds – I don't know anybody that comes out of custody with that sort of money, male or female.*" **Probation Officer**

Janette had a council house, but this was next door to the neighbour she had been sent to prison for harassing, so she could not return to it. She had built up debts on the property, even though she could not live there, and this was stopping her from being able to get alternative accommodation, leaving her desperate:

> "*I just want a house with me children, that's all I want. I'm 42 you know, I don't want to be sleeping on the settee*" **Janette**

Similarly for Alison, debt was impacting her ability to acquire new housing and have somewhere to live with her children:

> "*I had financial issues, things I had to sort out, debts that had built up. The children were settled with their grandad and have actually decided to stay there. I had been renting so my house went, I'm renting again now but I still haven't got the kids back. I feel like I'm starting from the bottom.*" **Alison**

It can be seen how difficulties with housing can cause further trauma to mothers and their families on exiting prison. It is also evident that those who have experienced prior trauma may find this transition more difficult, as their internal and external resources for support will be less. As more layers of trauma are added, the likelihood of re-offending increases.

Case 7: Tammy

Tammy got a four-year sentence for a robbery offence and served two years in prison. She had been living on the streets at the time of the offence. She had two daughters aged 15 and 19 at the time of the research. She described how her previous partner had been abusive towards her for a long time (14 years). Her daughters had ended up in care as a result of the domestic violence which was occurring at home. She had then started drinking heavily.

On leaving prison she had initially been placed in a hostel but was surrounded by people with drink and drug problems and did not want to go back to that. She managed to get a place in supported housing and was about to become a grandma, so she felt she had turned a corner and finally achieved something positive.

Another significant issue with housing concerned the transfer of tenancies. In several cases grandma had moved into the family home in order to look after the children whilst mum was in prison. After a certain period of time had elapsed, it became her tenancy, so when women returned from prison, their home was no longer theirs. Mothers leaving prison were then required to try to get back on the housing list before they could get their own home and have somewhere for their children to live with them:

> "*I stayed with my mum, who lived in my house, she overtook my house, which was quite hard because it was my family home and coming out of prison to it being her family home, when I'd built it from nothing, all my money and everything went into it, it was quite hard and for my son to be there and for it not be his home, was quite hard for him.*" **Kerry**

> "*The boys, at the time stayed in their family home and because I was sentenced for longer than six months, I'm, I cannot take the tenancy back over, so we are struggling to find somewhere else to live now.*" **Samantha**

In one case, which was an exception, a woman's mum (grandma) was able to pay rent for both houses while her daughter was in prison, although this was difficult financially:

> "*I'm living off my mam, so it doesn't make sense, I mean, yeah, inside my mam had to pay for my house as well, because I was one day over 13 weeks they wouldn't pay my rent, I would've been homeless, and so would my child.*"
> **Danielle**

For those needing to find new accommodation on release, the stigma of their sentence and also financial issues impacted this. Because women were often not able to get council housing due to offending, they were then forced to seek privately rented accommodation. Janette spoke about the difficulty of providing appropriate guarantors:

> "*I went to view a property in x the other day, that's where she's been enrolled in school, but they require a guarantor, which I've got, but he's retired and you need someone in full-time employment, I don't have any, so I'm stuck.*" **Janette**

Samantha had housing difficulties compounded by outstanding debts:

> "*As soon as you go to an agency they're like 'right, we need to do a credit check', and I'm not going to pass a credit check because I've got debts that I couldn't pay while I was in prison, so I'm in a vicious circle really.*" **Samantha**

The extracts above show the difficult housing situation that arises when women leave prison, stigmatised by their offending history, and usually financially unstable, and then because of the lack of suitable housing, unable to have their children back home to live with them. As Samantha says, it is a '*vicious circle*' that leaves women starting from the bottom, in many cases removed from any sources of support, and for some being placed at risk of further traumatisation.

The other factor that interacts with the housing issue, is that of poverty. Women leaving prison are required to make a new claim for benefits, now Universal Credit, which cannot be done until you have left custody. There is then usually a considerable wait until any money reaches your account, as Danielle stated:

> "*I've been out nearly three weeks and I've never had a penny.*" **Danielle**

Danielle was lucky insofar as her family were able to support her, but many mothers do not have that help available to them. There may also be issues around custody: if a woman's children are unable to return to live with them, then the amount of benefit they

may be entitled to is reduced. For some, like Samantha and Alison, the next concern was finding a job. The stigma of prison continues to impact greatly on this:

> "*I came out on March 18th and the next day I started applying for jobs, and I'd applied for 132 jobs, I got a couple of interviews, but as soon as I was honest with them, from the very start and said 'this is what's happened' I didn't get anywhere*" **Samantha**

> "*It will be a massive hurdle with the job searching as it's all over the internet, anyone can do a search, they will know. I have considered changing my name, it's a huge hurdle.*" **Alison**

Samantha did eventually secure a job in a hotel, but Andrea's prison sentence many years earlier, had continued to affect her entire life:

> "*I've applied to university on a number of occasions but been refused a place at the last minute. The same with nurse training, I've been honest about my criminal record, ticked it on the form, been given a start date and then refused. It's very frustrating. I feel like I can't do anything.*" **Andrea**

Echoing Masson (2019), getting a job was not just about the financial stability it offered, it was part of re-joining the community, using your skills and having a routine and a purpose, something to get up for:

> "*I just want to find a job, I want to get back into work, I've never ever not worked since the day I left school, so that's what's killing us the most, I'm so used to being like really busy.*" **Alicia**

> "*The biggest turning point was getting a job, because you feel like you're worth something again.*" **Samantha**

It is well documented that mothers leaving prison may have limited options for securing stable housing (Prison Reform Trust, 2018a). This study has revealed the ongoing nature of these difficulties and linked this into the wider traumas that women may experience as part of a period in custody. It also shows the impact that lack of housing can have on family relations, parenting and family stability. Equally important are issues with claiming benefits on release, which add another layer of difficulty to mother's ability to survive outside prison, with in some cases the stigma of the offence blocking opportunities for both housing and employment. The next section will analyse more closely the implications of stigma for criminalised mothers and their families on leaving custody.

8.4.2 Stigma

Wider factors affecting women's reintegration into the family, community and society added to the traumatic impact of their prison sentence. Stigma related to being a mother involved in the criminal justice system was evident at many stages of the women's experiences as detailed in **Section 7.4.2**. Post-prison was when stigma was perhaps even more acutely felt, creating barriers to reintegration in terms of housing, employment and relationships. Goffman (1963) described how stigma taints and discredits a person and leads to social exclusion. Many of the practitioners and mothers interviewed talked about the stigma that was attached to them, and also the greater impact of this for women as opposed to men who had been in custody:

> "*I think women just carry more shame on their shoulders from it than men.*"
> **Samantha**

> "*A woman in prison has to deal with what's going on outside as well, in the wider family. It affects you in a much bigger way than it does a man.*" **Alison**

As outlined in previous sections, women were particularly concerned about reactions from the local community on leaving prison; this created social anxiety and for some, difficulties around leaving the house for fear of being seen in public. These issues were made worse by the internet and social media whereby information can be shared and is permanently accessible to others.

For some of the mothers to the nature of their offence caused issues within the local community, Angela in particular struggled with this:

> "*I bumped into my ex- next-door neighbours at the job centre once, the job centre got me out through the back doors as they threatened to kill me! So I thought it best to leave the area as well.*" **Angela**

On a more personal basis, Linda described how her prison sentence was still an issue for her now grown-up daughter who would bring it up in arguments:

> "'*Do you know what it's like to have a mam in prison?*'" **Linda**

A member of probation staff outlined how women who offended were not always taken seriously as victims of crime:

> "*They're 'if we took them to court, they're an unreliable witness' so unless we have absolute evidence that we wouldn't need to call them as a witness, there's no point in going with it, so it almost makes it acceptable to perpetrate offences*

on them. 'Cos it goes round very quickly within the offending group of people, this has happened to her, and we know it's happened. but nowt's happened about it so, you know...it's horrible it's really sad." **Probation Officer**

This illustrates the blurred lines between victim and offender that often exists for women caught up in the criminal justice system. In addition to criminalised women's marginalised position within society, it is clear how those who have experienced trauma are then more likely to encounter further traumas due to increased vulnerability and lack of appropriate support systems. Angela spoke about this with regards to her informing the police about a man who repeatedly came to her children's home, approaching young girls. She felt she was not taken seriously as a victim, as she was on probation, and that affected how seriously her allegations were being taken:

"*Well why are they thingying it because I'm on probation? I don't think that's right, because, so if you go out, and you get raped god forbid, and if you're on probation they just thingy it off?*" **Angela**

A probation officer also raised the view, apparently held by some professionals, that some people they were working with had been given enough chances:

"*I hate people talking about burning bridges, 'they're a risk, they're a woman and they've been to prison', no- they've just not taken their kids to school. They're not a risk. I'm sure it's just 3% of women in custody are high risk, so the rest is just acquisitive offending and mistakes, and it really frustrates us because we have the evidence there to say that holistic approaches and women's centres and individual approaches for women work and yet we keep sending women to prison.*" **Probation Officer**

These comments raise serious issues about how we stigmatise people based on past behaviour, leaving them unable to move on from past situations.

One member of staff did question whether we were excusing people by looking at past trauma, making the point that not all people who have a traumatic upbringing or experience turn to crime. This is an important point, which ties in with ideas of seeing women who have offended as victims, thus removing their agency. The issue of 'double deviancy' and gendered expectations of behaviour was also raised as an issue for women, and particularly mothers, who had been in prison:

"*Women are expected to behave in a certain way, and so once you are not behaving in that certain way, you are judged even more than say a man would be...just the society we live in, you're gonna get judged if you're a woman, you*

hear it amongst professionals without them even realising sometimes what they're saying it was 'that was a woman!' and you never say 'that was a man!' you still get that you know so, if you get someone for serious assault it's often 'they should know better' so they've got to deal with that as well." **Probation Officer**

As outlined in **Section 6.4.1**, gendered expectations regarding parenting and parental responsibility also come to the fore for women:

"*Fathers aren't judged that way, they're not the ultimate, if you're a mam and you're not doing a very good job or you're not coping very well ultimately it's seen as your responsibility, I think if you're a dad you just don't, I'm not saying you don't have pressures but you don't have that same amount of pressures, I mean I think one of the classic ones is the kids not going to school, where the mam gets sent to prison, well what about the dad? It's mam that gets fined, but no one's blaming the absent dad. And I just think even if you're not there, it's your responsibility too, but the mam gets it all.*" **Probation Officer**

Women continue to be held ultimately responsible for children in most cases and are therefore judged on their parenting abilities, or perceptions thereof. As outlined in **Chapter 2** this increases their likelihood of being convicted of certain offences, and creates an additional layer of stigma for them. This can then increase their marginalisation, both socially and financially. As described above, these widely held beliefs about women and mothers continue to create stigma for women who have been in prison, adding to the difficulties they face reintegrating into the community.

8.5 Summary

This chapter has outlined the difficulties experienced by mothers and their families on leaving prison; this is understood as the third traumatic phase of imprisonment. It has shown how on leaving prison mothers were unprepared for the complex mix of emotions they felt, with many of the mothers describing uncertainty and a feeling of not being able to cope with life on the outside. They were faced with difficulties readjusting to the role of mother and reuniting with their children. Many felt that there had been long term changes to their relationships with both their children and those caring for them. This included feelings of bitterness and anger at what had occurred. In some cases, children had still not returned to live with them. This illustrates the intergenerational traumatic impact that prison can inflict on families.

These traumatic feelings interacted with other structural traumas making the process of rehabilitation increasingly difficult. This included problems with housing and employment and a feeling of stigmatisation that often left mothers struggling with daily activities. Some of the women continued to have no suitable accommodation meaning they were unable to have their children home to live with them. One woman told of how she had applied for 132 jobs before finally securing employment. Others were battling anxiety that became heightened on leaving the confines of the prison and returning to daily life. There was often little support provided to adapt to life post-prison. This chapter has shown the enduring impact of maternal imprisonment on mothers themselves, their children and their wider families.

Chapter 9: Understanding the impact of prison on mothers and families

9.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the main research findings and their implications for maternal imprisonment, policy, and practice. The study set out with the aim of better understanding how maternal imprisonment affects mothers and families, and how it depletes the human and social resources of the family. Using a socio-ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), informed by feminist trauma theory (Burstow, 2003), particularly research concerning intergenerational trauma (Menzies, 2010; Heberle, Obus and Gray, 2020), the study intended to understand the wider traumas enacted on mothers and their families by a period of imprisonment. In this way, the study analysed prior trauma in mothers' lives, the traumatic impact of prison and the enduring impact of these events once individuals were released back into the community. These 'phases of trauma' offer a new contribution to knowledge around the impact of maternal imprisonment and its wider effects.

The emotional, financial and social price that families experience as a result of maternal imprisonment is shown by this study to be far reaching, potentially outweighing any harm done by the original offence. This analysis will consider the findings of the research in light of trauma theory, understanding maternal imprisonment as trauma inflicted by the state on mothers, children and kinship carers. It will be argued that this enduring, intergenerational trauma adds further layers of trauma onto often already vulnerable individuals, disadvantaging them further and disrupting their lives so deeply that they may never recover. The analysis suggests that intervening before a mother is sentenced to custody is of paramount importance in order to avoid the additional trauma that will be enacted by imprisonment on her and her family. In this respect, it aligns with previous research in this field (Booth, 2020b; Masson, 2019; Baldwin, 2021). It also brings into question the purpose of imprisonment for mothers, who in general have not committed particularly serious or violent offences and are not considered a danger to the community.

Taking a gendered viewpoint, it is clear that women, who are often the main carers of dependent children, have many additional pressures in terms of childcare responsibilities and the financial burden of providing for the family. Maternal imprisonment can therefore be seen as compounding these issues, and, as Wacquant (2009) suggests, criminalising poverty and disadvantage. This chapter will discuss the

findings of the research in relation to the research questions and other academic literature as outlined in the literature review chapters, highlighting the contribution to knowledge that this research makes. It will also discuss the limitations of the research and areas for further research and will make recommendations based on the findings.

The aims of the study are set out below:

• To explore the role of inter-generational trauma in the lives of mothers who have experienced prison.

• To identify how maternal imprisonment depletes the human and social resources of the family.

• To identify what works to support mothers in and after prison and the coping techniques they use to deal with imprisonment.

The questions that this research set out to answer were:

- What evidence is there of the existence of trauma in mothers' lives prior to going to prison and what effect does it have?
- How are mothers' lives affected by imprisonment and how do they maintain relationships with their children?
- Do the intergenerational harms of maternal imprisonment persist after the period of custody?

9.2 Theorising the intergenerational impact of maternal imprisonment

The theoretical framework through which the research was carried out, and the data analysed, provided a new way of understanding issues relating to maternal imprisonment. Although some researchers have previously used socio-ecological frameworks to understand parental, rather than maternal, imprisonment (Arditti, 2005), their work was not integrated with trauma theory, which was utilised in this study in order to understand the enduring gendered harms of maternal imprisonment at different levels. Using this framework has enabled a different way of describing and understanding the impact of maternal imprisonment on mothers and their families, building on previous research in this field. The definition of 'trauma' used, as outlined in **Section 4.4**, has enabled my research to uncover the wider impacts of maternal imprisonment and move away from an approach that situates the reasons for maternal imprisonment solely within individuals and their families. This has led to an

understanding that the harms of maternal imprisonment add further layers of trauma to families that are already disadvantaged and, in many cases, struggling with everyday life. This creates a situation where they become more disadvantaged and stigmatised.

Taking influence from studies describing the process of intergenerational trauma in indigenous communities (Menzies, 2010) has given an understanding of how the effects of maternal imprisonment spread beyond the individual concerned, also affecting their children and kinship carers (who are often the children's grandmothers). It has not just illustrated the individual harms experienced, but also those relating to families, communities, and wider society. Adopting this approach has allowed analysis on multiple levels in order to understand the interaction of prior, prison, and post-prison factors with individual, family, community and societal factors for different family members. This has resulted in a coherent understanding of the issues affecting mothers who have experienced imprisonment from a new angle.

Research shows that gender can contribute to the likelihood of experiencing trauma across the lifetime, intersecting with other factors such as race and sexuality. Women are more likely to have experienced traumatic experiences, both within childhood and across the lifespan (Cortina and Kubiak, 2006). These experiences interact with the greater social inequalities that women experience, such as lower socio-economic status and a greater reliance on welfare benefits (Povey, 2017). Women are more likely to experience violence within their intimate relationships, with evidence showing that although domestic abuse occurs across many different types of relationship, women are more at risk of enduring trauma, serious injury, and domestic homicide (Renzetti, Edleson and Bergen, 2018). Women are more likely to be diagnosed with PTSD, as outlined in **Section 2.3.2**, and also to be given the label of 'personality disordered' (American Psychiatric Association, 2004). This evidence illustrates the importance of seeking to understand the wider role of gender inequality impacting on all areas of women's lives within this context. This is not to ignore the trauma experienced by men, and particularly men from minority groups, but to call for a different approach to supporting women that takes account of their different experiences within society.

The main question that the study tried to answer concerned evidence of intergenerational trauma in the lives of mothers who have experienced a prison sentence and their families. Intergenerational trauma was defined and conceptualised

in the study as trauma that was experienced by, and passed on to, multiple generations within a family. In this case, mothers were asked about their prior experiences and upbringing, their experiences of prison, and any impacts it had on other family members, both during, and after prison. Based on work stemming from research with indigenous communities in Canada and Australia, such as Braveheart-Jordan and DeBruyn (1995) and Menzies (2010), which was then transposed onto the context of mothers in prison, this model introduced a new way of conceptualising the harms of maternal imprisonment.

9.2.1 Phases of trauma

The research led to identifying three distinct 'phases of trauma' as experienced by mothers given a custodial sentence (see **Figure 9.1**). Understanding trauma in a wider sense, beyond individual experiences, allowed the study to understand the many different factors impacting on women's lives. This sociological framework for trauma allowed the formulation of harms enacting at different levels to be named and understood as stemming from the period of imprisonment. The evidence within the study for the existence of intergenerational trauma in people affected by maternal imprisonment will be set out below.

The first phase of trauma identified represents the period prior to prison; prior trauma was a central feature of many women's lives, either in terms of experiences in their childhood, adult life, or their experiences of the criminal justice system, as outlined in **Chapter 6**. In some cases this was characterised by the time lapse between arrest and sentencing; in many cases, prior to this, there had been a build-up of issues or a deterioration in coping that led to the offence or the discovery of the offence. This was particularly evident in cases of fraud, as illustrated by Samantha (see **Case 6**) and Alison's narratives. This period was generally characterised by extreme stress on the individual, and in some cases their wider family members, such as Lisa describes in **Section 6.4.3**. Women's narratives described a deterioration in mental health, an increase in substance misuse, physical health issues and, in some cases, financial and housing difficulties. This culminated in the day of sentencing, which many were unprepared for and attended alone. As previous research by Booth (2020b) and Masson (2019) describes, many of the mothers in this study were not expecting to be given a custodial sentence, and were in many cases advised that this would be highly unlikely, so were unprepared for entering custody.

The central phase of trauma identified was the period of imprisonment itself, characterised by loss and powerlessness (see **Chapter 7**). The experience of separation from children, loss of maternal identity, and being unable to help those at home was, for many, overwhelming. Some women were supported by particular friendships or members of staff within the prison, but many described the shock of the physical environment, and the psychological pressures with no distractions, as difficult to bear. Some mothers who were already estranged from their children, described fewer harms and less intense emotions, but these feelings were often subsequently numbed by drugs or alcohol. The women's narratives showed a huge amount of strength and resilience: they had to, and did, get through the experience and tried to do their best to continue supporting their families in extremely adverse circumstances.

The final phase of trauma, which is to some extent open ended, is that experienced by mothers and families back in the community (see **Chapter 8**). The assumption that once released from custody, mothers should be overjoyed to be out, and to be back with their children, did not really ring true; for many this was the most difficult and confusing stage. Women described issues relating to their relationships, their maternal role within the family, mental health, and practical issues such as housing, benefits, and employment. Stigma in the community was another major problem, particularly for those who had attracted widespread media attention. Women described feeling as though they had let everyone down, and some described how feelings of negativity were triggered by comments made by family members. Some of the women described changes to their sense of self as a result of custody; there were also permanent changes to family dynamics. This included differing impacts for younger and older children as they navigated changes to their lives and routines. The impact for older children was particularly significant, although much previous research tends to centre on younger children. One exception is Lockwood (2020), who describes how there are significant challenges for older children as they move on, grow older and get more independent. Women had to show great strength and determination to restart their lives. Samantha (see **Case 6**), for instance, had applied for 132 jobs before she was finally successful in gaining employment. Tammy spoke of how she had managed to stop drinking and turn her life around, despite the difficult circumstances she found herself in.

Figure 9.1: A trauma model for maternal imprisonment
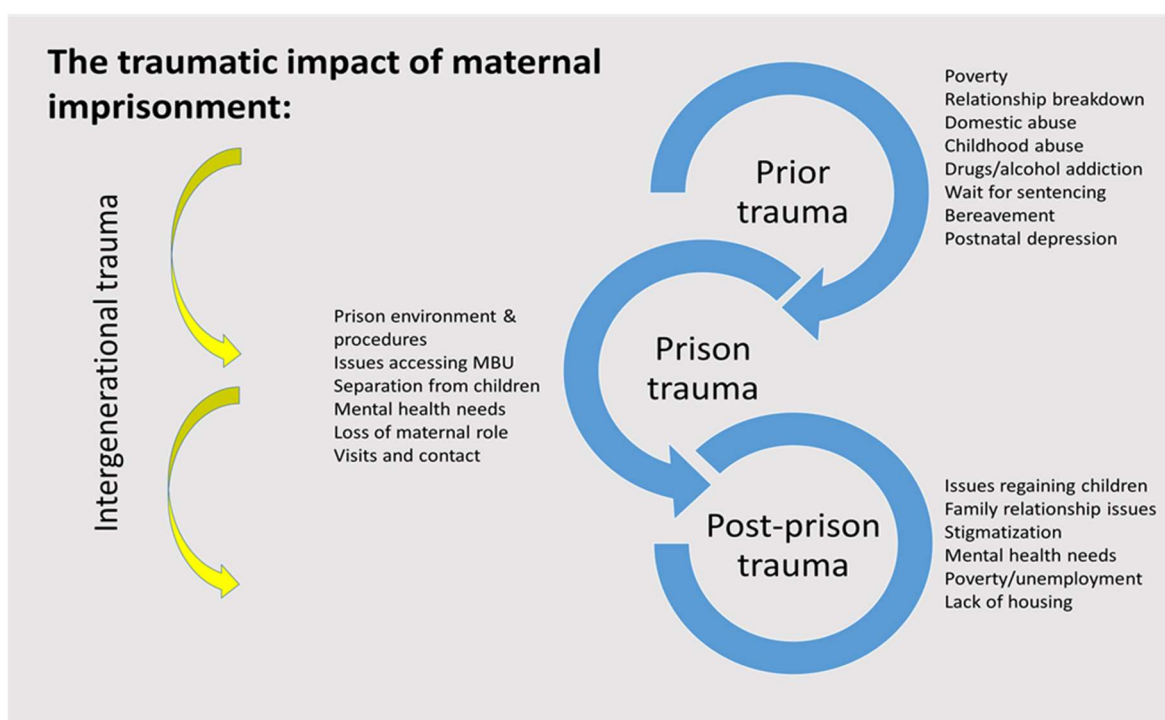
9.3 Evidence of prior trauma for mothers and families

Although there is an increasing body of work concerning the identification of prior trauma in the lives of women with offending histories (Green *et al.*, 2005; Greene, Haney and Hurtado, 2000; Cook *et al.*, 2005), studies have usually centred on either individual or wider factors separately, rather than building a complete picture. They have often focused on abuse, such as intimate partner violence, child abuse and sexual violence, rather than wider traumas. One finding of the current research was the prevalence of issues arising due to postnatal depression in the lives of the women interviewed (see **Section 6.2.2**). Although previous research (Kauppi *et al.*, 2008; Poobalan *et al.*, 2007) has identified issues regarding the general impact of post-natal depression, as detailed in **Chapter 2**, there is less research available relating it to offending behaviour in women. This suggests that this is a key finding of the study and an area that is currently under-researched.

Issues surrounding the prior removal of children from a family were also identified as significant. In some cases, children had already been removed to someone else's care, often that of another family member. There was little support for mothers after this had

occurred to help them deal with the emotions and issues arising from this situation. Although previous research into maternal imprisonment has highlighted the period of custody as the reason for separation of mother and child (Celinska and Siegel, 2010; Epstein, 2014), in many cases, where children have been removed, this may have occurred prior to custody and may have been a reason for the mother's difficulties. From a socio-ecological viewpoint, this shows the wider societal level issues at play, with the continuing issue of children being removed in the context of domestic abuse occurring within the family home. This finding suggests that much more support is needed for mothers after a child is removed. Conversely, many women were left with the responsibility of being the main carer for dependent children after separation or divorce, with the ensuing financial burden this produced. No analysis was however made in this research of any financial support that fathers may have been providing.

Many women described a significant deterioration in their mental health whilst waiting for sentencing, and the negative effect this had on their families. Women were particularly at risk of poverty and homelessness during this time, as described by Lisa (see **Case 5**). This also relates to previously documented issues around mothers not being prepared for custody, and childcare arrangements requiring to be made at extremely short notice. For mothers, in particular, more warning is needed to give them time to make arrangements for being absent from the family and responsibilities at home. Aligning with previous findings, such as Booth (2020b), women's unpreparedness for custody, needlessly added additional trauma to the experience of actually being sentenced. As detailed by previous research (Masson, 2019), many mothers in the study were advised that they would not get a custodial sentence, which left them in a state of shock and unpreparedness when it did happen.

9.3.1 Intimate partner violence and victimisation

As anticipated, intimate partner violence was an issue which ran through the women's stories, echoing findings from other research in the area (Segrave and Carlton, 2010). Having seen first-hand the devastation caused by domestic abuse when working as a practitioner, this was not a surprise to me. Previous research, as detailed in **Chapter 2,** suggests that IPV is experienced by many women involved in the criminal justice system worldwide. IPV can affect all areas of a woman's life, and result in her inability to feel safe anywhere, with some research suggesting that, for a minority of women, custody provides a safe haven (Bradley and Davino, 2002). Women's strategies to

survive abuse may not always make sense to someone outside of the situation, particularly when this results in the removal of their children due to the abuse. The impact on children living within that situation is also significant, however, and there are often few options for social workers other than to remove children from the family (Peckover and Trotter, 2015).

The research showed that direct coercion to offend was a factor for some women, such as Lisa and Kerry, in-so-far as they reported that their co-defendant was also their abuser. This raises the question of how far we see women who offend as victims, rather than people with agency themselves. There are arguments on both sides of these standpoints. One of the practitioners interviewed, for example, raised the issue of 'excusing', explaining that not all women who have experienced trauma such as this go on to offend. She went on to question whether trauma is being used as an excuse for this behaviour when individuals resort to offending. However, the mothers' narratives strongly suggest that prior trauma is a factor in the lives of many women in prison. For those who are able to access good support and achieve financial stability, it may be possible to overcome it, but when we add in other deprivations and disadvantages, the odds become stacked against people.

There was evidence of a level of self-blame from victims of IPV in this study, who spoke about how they should not have let it happen, they should have known (that the partner was abusive), and so on (see Lisa and Kerry). This victimisation can become a part of other facets of how people are treated; one practitioner talked about how some women become seen as 'unreliable' so if they then report a crime, it is not fully investigated and they are at risk of further victimisation. They may be seen by professionals in supportive roles as having 'burnt their bridges' and being undeserving of another chance. This mindset means that such women are not able to access appropriate support. However, other practitioners spoke about always keeping in mind that people can and do change, and that this was one of the most important, but also hardest, parts of working with criminalised women.

9.3.2 Survival offending and the criminalisation of poverty
Many of the mothers could be described as struggling to survive prior to prison, their offending being the result of other factors in their lives that had come to a head. This gives evidence of the gendered pressures of family life within advanced capitalist

society. The research suggested that there were issues relating to society and gender roles. The majority of the women who took part in the research were either separated, divorced or their partner had passed away. They were therefore left in many cases to care for their children on their own. It can be hypothesised that this would have a financial impact on the family and several of the women clearly stated this. For example, Naomi and Samantha spoke of how they were trying to provide the same level of lifestyle for their children as before and, in some cases, this seemed to be a factor in offending (see **Section 6.4.1**). Without excusing their actions, this does explain to some extent how their offending may have come about, particularly for those found guilty of committing fraud, who were generally working full time in addition to caring for their children on their own.

Consideration of the kind of offences that women are likely to commit and be sentenced for, provides more evidence that gender is an important issue. Historically, many women have been sentenced to custody for shoplifting and, in many cases, this has involved either acquiring money for drugs (often to deal with traumatic experiences) or to support the family. Some offences, as mentioned in **Chapter 2,** are more likely to be applied to women, partly because they are more likely to be in the specific situation described; for example, being drunk in charge of a child, non-payment of a television licence, non-attendance of child at school, benefit fraud. These tend to make up the bulk of offences committed by women on probation. Other offences are commonly related to attempting to survive in a situation where domestic abuse is occurring. Many of the women in this study had additionally experienced loss and bereavement, (see **Section 6.2.3),** either through losing loved ones prematurely, removal of children, or experiences such as having a stillborn child (Rutter, 2021).

One of the practitioners interviewed called this 'survival offending', offending in order to provide for yourself and your family. Women can bear the brunt of the penal system when they are left to bring up children on their own. This connects with Wacquant's ideas around the 'penalization of poverty' (Wacquant, 2001). Povey (2017) describes how women, specifically, have often been the victims of multiple deprivations, victimisation and neglect. She notes how child removal has been a "significant, highly traumatic feature" (p.272) for many marginalised women. This analysis also includes discussion of the overlap of penal and welfare agencies, questioning the role of these agencies, which can often become confused: is it punitive or supportive? Welfare

reform policies can also result in further marginalisation of women who rely more on these services, as Povey suggests. In parallel with this research, the question is raised concerning the individualisation of women's problems when they are in a position of disadvantage, at the expense of locating this within structural issues stemming from the state and socio-economic problems. Michalsen (2019, p. 504) goes further, arguing that the system of imprisoning women is itself built upon the criminalisation of survival strategies, and creates a "victimization to prison" pipeline.

9.4 The trauma of custody for mothers and families

During the period of imprisonment itself, which for the mothers interviewed ranged from weeks to years, there were many examples of harms endured. As previous research has suggested, separation from children and loss of maternal identity were a major part of this, alongside the physical and emotional environment of the prison (Arditti, 2012b; Baldwin, 2017). Many women spoke about the camaraderie they experienced through supportive friendships, while others received invaluable help from staff, often when at their lowest points. Elements of the research which are significant and less widely reported are outlined below.

Coping within prison was largely due to friendships that were formed and the camaraderie that this provided. For many women, this was their first time spent exclusively amongst other females and a number of women reported laughing, joking and making friendships. However, there was often a guilt-tinged edge to this, as if they should not be laughing when in that situation. Mothers also reported that having friends or relatives who were also in custody and 'knew the ropes' was also beneficial. In situations where trusted family members were looking after children on the outside, this alleviated some of the worries about how children were being cared for, although some had fears that partners or family members would file for guardianship of their children permanently. The other major point raised regarded the actions of and relationships with individual members of staff who were key to meeting women's needs in some way.

9.4.1 The under use of prison visits

One finding that this research was able to provide more detail about was regards visits and how they can be particularly problematic for mothers in prison. Although visits are an extremely important way of maintaining contact and family relationships (Booth, 2018), there are significant problems with how they operate and consequently, this

affects their uptake. Although family days and other visits may have been theoretically available to the women interviewed, there were many barriers - financial, physical and emotional - to them taking place. This illustrates that visits can, in some cases, be a potentially traumatic element of custody for mothers. This was generally caused by conflict between, on the one hand, mothers' understandable desire to see their children, versus the guilt, shame and fear about them having to enter the prison environment. Mothers also spoke about the emotional trauma of the visit itself and the rules, and the effect on themselves and their children when they had to end the visit. For some the emotional impact of this was too much, so they did not have visits.

For many of the women who took part in the research, their children had not been told where their mother was, therefore, they were not able to visit, highlighting the huge ongoing issues around stigma and mothers' imprisonment. Some researchers have termed this 'ambiguous loss', understanding the emotions raised as being similar to grieving for a bereavement, albeit one that is physically absent but psychologically present (Boss, 1999). Children may have been told that mum was working away or on holiday, as aligns with previous research (Booth, 2020b; Masson, 2019). This study also identified additional issues regarding children with special educational needs (SEN) and the failure of appropriate adjustments to be made for them to access visits (see **Section 7.3.3**). These findings go some way to helping us understand the poor uptake of prison visits and 'family days' in some women's prisons. The Farmer report (Farmer, 2019) prioritises maintaining family relationships and suggests that prisons should survey residents about visits and barriers to accessing them. My research suggests that more thought needs to be given to working with mums in prison to discuss their feelings of guilt, shame and fear about visits, their children entering the prison, and their children knowing where they are. Peer support groups could be beneficial to this, allowing women to share their feelings and experiences in a safe, non-judgemental space.

9.4.2 Loss of maternal role

In terms of the prison experience itself, the primary difficulty was regarding loss of the mothering role, as outlined by Baldwin (2021). This manifested in feelings of powerlessness, guilt and loss of control. The mothers were aware that their families desperately needed their help, financially, physically and emotionally, but were unable to do anything to assist from the confines of the prison. This led to feelings of low self-

worth, self-blame and negative self-image. Some of the women described punishing themselves by not eating, which could be seen as an attempt to have control of something, in this case their own bodies. Families, too, may feel they have been abandoned and left to deal with things on their own. Heberle, Obus and Gray (2020) describe the imprisonment of mothers in terms of trauma perpetrated through formal social systems, and as a form of 'state-perpetrated violence'. This trauma can be exacerbated by other factors, such as race and class. Menzies (2010) has described children experiencing vicarious trauma as a result of imprisonment and social marginalisation, which was also evident in this study. For instance, Lisa's son was hugely affected by her imprisonment, becoming violent towards his girlfriend and extremely angry and depressed, resulting in his attempting suicide. Other mothers also described reactions from children including fear of being alone, bed wetting and problems at school. This builds up a picture of how it is worse for the family on the outside, as many of the women said. As will be outlined below, these issues do not disappear once a woman is released from prison; there is evidence of irreparable damage to relationships and family ties occurring as a result of maternal imprisonment.

This state-enforced separation of mother and child can be seen as destruction of the family unit resulting in dislocation. Others have questioned whether it is an infringement of human rights and/or child rights to deny a stable home, love and understanding to a developing child (Minson, 2019b). This study has given new and additional evidence of the far-reaching and long-lasting effects of maternal imprisonment, building up a picture of the different levels of impact and the effects on wider family members. Some feminist researchers, for instance, Dominelli (2002), describe severing the mother-child bond for minor offences, as often occurs, as symbolic of patriarchal systems and the ongoing control of women. Minson (2019b) perceives separation due to imprisonment from a legal-based child rights perspective, arguing that children whose parents appear in the criminal courts are treated differentially to those in the family courts.

Evidence from this study aligned with research by Lockwood (2020), showing that the effects of maternal imprisonment on older children and young people were also significant. There was not necessarily a smaller impact on older children but one that manifested in different ways. Young people in this age group are forming their attitudes to society and finding their place within it; evidence showed their quite extreme attempts at coping with the situation, including, leaving the country, working away and

moving in with partners. In one case, anger and violence towards a female partner became an issue.

9.5 Trauma after custody experienced by mothers and families

Following any period of imprisonment, the assumption is often made that mothers and families will just resume where they left off, but this research has provided evidence of the ongoing nature of the impact of a prison sentence, as outlined below. This was observed in damage to relationships, ongoing issues with mental health and self-worth, problems regaining contact with children and re-establishing the mother role, and housing and employment problems. Women described feeling lost when they left prison, and many reported a lack of support with reintegrating into the community (see **Chapter 8**). Understanding the criminal justice system as a source of trauma in itself, as this research has described, the question is raised as to whether this is all part of the punishment, and, if so, is it justifiable in terms of the offences these women have committed? When also considering the damaging effects on kinship carers and children, and the difficulties that they face, the wider intergenerational impact must also be considered.

Trauma does not just have an emotional or psychological impact, but also takes a physical toll on the body resulting in poor health. As Lisa described (see **Section 8.3.3**), her mother physically aged and became unwell, due in part to the constant worry about both her grandson, who she was caring for, and her daughter in prison. For women in prison, their physical and mental health may deteriorate due to the lack of physical activity, dietary changes and the indoor environment. This too can have a deleterious effect on mental and emotional wellbeing; there are few distractions in prison from the psychological distress caused by being separated from home and family as Danielle described (see **Section 7.2.2**).

9.5.1 Irreparable damage to self and relationships

An important traumatic element that the research uncovered, was with regard to damage that was inflicted on the self and relationships by the period of imprisonment. This ran throughout the phases of contact with the criminal justice system. The concept of 'needing punishing', as spoken about by Cheryl, or of being to blame for the occurrence of IPV, supports previous research concerning women's greater likelihood to take things out on themselves rather than others, internalising external experiences

and using self-punishment as a coping mechanism. This evidence also relates to ideas referred to in **Chapter 2** regarding stigmatisation of mothers who offend and the concept of 'double deviance'. Continuing after prison, women spoke about feeling like a 'different person', not being outgoing anymore, not wanting to socialise with people, and harbouring guilt and shame. These feelings will have an enduring impact on how they view themselves going forward, and on their confidence and self-esteem. These kinds of issues are hard to quantify and would benefit from specific further research.

In this study, at least two of the women had made suicide attempts and another described suicidal ideation. Research suggests many women in contact with the criminal justice system (46%) may have made attempts on their own life (Prison Reform Trust, 2019). These issues alongside, those of self-concept, are likely to be tied up with issues around wider damage to relationships. As Anderson (2021), discusses, our relationships are intimately tied up with our sense of self. Loss of relationships can therefore, in some cases, equate with loss of our sense of self. The impact of losses to relationships, including those with children, can result in changes to identity and disenfranchised grief, as described by Doka (1999). Others have described 'post-incarceration syndrome' as a specific diagnosis under the PTSD umbrella (Liem and Kunst, 2013). Women particularly spoke about difficulties when they left prison with re-entering the mother role, and the anger and blame directed towards them by kinship carers and sometimes also their children (see **Section 8.3.3**).

Relationships with kinship carers were particularly highlighted by this study as problematic, both during and after imprisonment, and this is an area less well researched in previous studies. Relationships underwent huge strain, kinship carers had to take over with little notice, and with no financial assistance, whilst taking in the shock at the loss of their daughter at the same time as caring for grandchildren. Parents and carers also had to face stigma in the community, which was often most prevalent in the period after sentencing for high profile cases that attracted media attention. Condry (2007) describes the impact of 'kin contamination' and 'kin culpability' for relatives of those in prison. In some cases, children may never go home: in some cases this was a temporary state of affairs, but in others it became permanent; family ties were permanently severed by even short absences due to imprisonment.

9.5.2 Stigmatisation and social trauma

Stigmatisation was a theme which carried through from pre-sentencing, reappearing as women re-entered the community; while families had to also endure this during the period of custody, as they were the ones carrying on life in the community. In the pre-prison phase women spoke about how they went to court on their own in many cases, bearing the shame of being a criminalised mother alone. They were fearful of what their families and children would think of them and whether they would stick by them, as Naomi said:

> *"Me husband wouldn't speak to us, I did think the kids wouldn't speak to us, and I just felt so low, so down, so disgusted in meself."* **Naomi**

Some women reported that they told no one they were in prison, and in other cases friends and family members refused to visit them. As outlined in **Chapter 7**, this was tied in with self-punishment, women describing how they needed to be punished and, in some cases, restricting their food intake. Once back in the community, this had a huge impact on emotional wellbeing, leading to anxiety, depression and isolation. Mothers also experienced stigma within their own families, from their mothers and, in some cases, their children. This may be a reflection of the reactions the families themselves had been enduring since the offence first became known outside of the family.

Stigma had a ripple effect that began to invade all areas of the women's lives, adding further trauma. This included difficulties with accessing housing due to having a criminal record, which was made especially hard for certain offences such as arson. It also affected employment prospects and one mother, Naomi, was also fearful that it would also affect her son's employment opportunities. Although some of the women were successful in overcoming this Samantha, for instance, had to apply for 132 jobs before she was given a chance by an employer. This ongoing social trauma created anxiety and severely affected women's mental health, and therefore their ability to carry out their normal activities. Two of the mothers had extreme anxiety following prison, which caused them difficulties in getting to and from appointments that they were required to attend. In some cases, the stigma was also perceived as another reason why regaining contact with children was difficult post-custody, as Caitlin found. These wider social effects of the prison sentence were particularly harmful, causing mothers

to feel that their sentence would never really end; as Samantha said, "*maybe that's part of the whole punishment*".

9.6 Limitations of the research

As with any piece of research, there are limitations arising from the research design, sampling, and consequent outcomes of the study. As discussed in **Chapter 5**, although I had originally intended to speak to a sample of mothers who were currently in custody, this proved too difficult. Deciding instead to speak with mothers in the community, after their period of imprisonment, has given a slightly different perspective to the research. It allowed greater flexibility in terms of when, where, and for how long women could be interviewed. It also allowed them to reflect on their journey through the criminal justice system as a whole, with the benefit of hindsight. As the majority of the women were still being supervised by probation, and had not long returned to the community, the prison experience was still foremost in their minds. However, peaking with women in prison may have given different perspectives, so this needs to be acknowledged.

The research study did not have the scope to speak with children, kinship carers or other family members directly to ascertain their lived experiences. This would have given more detail about how they felt and how they coped during the mother's imprisonment but would also have made for a much larger study. Taking the mothers' perspective allowed the research to be more focused and achievable within the time and cost constraints, but further research eliciting the views of children and carers would be beneficial and increase understanding.

As this was a qualitative research study, the sample size of women involved with the research was relatively small, although comparable with other studies of this type. Partly due to the small sample size, and also the region that the research was conducted in, the sample was not ethnically diverse. Despite this, it did reflect the make-up of the overall cohort of women on probation in this region. However, due to the lack of ethnic diversity, the research outcomes cannot claim to be representative of all women's experiences of maternal custody and, in particular, the specific experiences of those from minority groups or foreign national prisoners.

It is apparent that those mothers who were in what can be termed, the category of highest need and marginalisation did not feature in the study. Staff members disclosed

the existence of a group of women they encountered who were particularly vulnerable: repeat offenders with long histories of offending and additional needs. Although I did attempt to access women belonging to this group via a member of staff who was working with them, this was not achieved. By virtue of the nature of the sampling strategy, I was only able to speak with women who were attending and engaging with services (in this instance probation staff and probation hubs). Women who were less engaged were by default harder to reach, and even though on occasion I made plans to interview such women, often they did not attend the agreed appointment and therefore their experiences were not heard. Other women who were struggling with issues over stigma or mental health were not willing to speak to me, which was understandable, but unfortunately meant that I was not able to hear their stories. Future research with this group of under-researched, harder to reach mothers would be important to understand the additional needs of this cohort and would require intensive work beforehand with both staff and women to gain their trust.

9.7 Conclusion: maternal imprisonment: an excessive price to pay?

Taking a whole picture approach to the research study and the issues it highlighted, it is clear that maternal imprisonment has a devastating effect on any family. It results in huge disruption and the devastation of relationships and lives. It is arguable whether this cost is justifiable, in addition to the punishment the person who has offended has received. Should their family also suffer in this way? The intergenerational traumatic impact of this, outlined by the research study, suggests that future generations will also be affected by a period of maternal imprisonment, due to the disruption of the mother-child relationship, and the disruption and consequent renegotiation of housing and employment and of this. It can therefore be argued that, if all this disruption and trauma is taken into account, it represents an excessive amount of punishment for a family to endure.

The impact of the trauma of prison on mothers' mental health does not leave mothers in a good place to start again from the bottom and successfully reintegrate on leaving prison. Many women spoke of the anxiety and stigma they experienced and the paranoia about what members of the community might be thinking or saying about them. The mothers who were interviewed as part of this research were generally not in denial about the consequences of their actions but knew full well the impact of the decisions they had made that led to custody. In light of this, the research suggests that

prison does little to provide rehabilitation for mothers and, in contrast, causes a significant amount of trauma which endures far beyond the initial custodial sentence itself.

For some women, as identified, prison can be an escape from issues on the outside such as homelessness and domestic abuse, but this should not be seen as an argument for continuing to imprison women. Without significant social support, there is little likelihood of reducing reoffending, especially when women are being returned to situations that are potentially less stable than when they went into prison, due to losing housing, employment and care of their children. The intergenerational traumatic impact of maternal imprisonment is shown to impact many areas of mothers', children's and kinship carers' lives. In some cases, detailed by the research, such as for Angela, this was continuing to affect her ability to secure stable accommodation or have a relationship with her grandchildren. For others, such as Cheryl, it had meant a fractured relationship with both her children and grandchildren and a feeling that the punishment is never ending. Mothers described how their older children were angry, had lost respect for authority and were fearful of mum being recalled. As a society, we need to consider whether these costs are justifiable or not, remembering that these mothers and their children are a valued part of that society.

9.7.1 Recommendations and future work

Recommendations arising from the findings of this research and areas for future work are outlined below:

1. A **wider definition of trauma** needs to be considered that understands the link between social experiences and trauma. Recognition of the social causes of trauma in women's lives is needed, encompassing gender issues, poverty and intimate partner violence, as opposed to purely using a definition of trauma that looks at the psychological impact of specific stressful events.
2. **Data** on the number of women with children in the prison system and the number of pregnant women needs to be routinely collected and published. In addition, better data collection regarding the visits women in prison receive, particularly with regard to family visits would assist in starting to identify some of the barriers to these relationships being maintained (see point 7).

3. In recent years **trauma informed training** for CJS staff has begun to be rolled out, by charities such as One Small Thing. This study has added to previous research by giving more evidence on the high prevalence of prior trauma in women involved in the criminal justice system. It is therefore vital that practitioners are given appropriate training to recognise how trauma affects individuals and how different situations can cause trauma. Although the limitations of this approach should be acknowledged, where possible this should be extended to staff working in the community with pre- and post-custody women.

4. The research has identified a need to recognise the **criminal justice system, and custody in particular as active causes of trauma**, not as a safe space or an appropriate punishment. This supports recent recommendations regarding custody being the last resort and calls for it to be used sparingly for women and especially, mothers. Women continue to be held a long way from home, in many cases and are unable to maintain ties with children and families. The traumatic impact of the prison experience has been shown to continue for a long time post-custody and to have wide-reaching effects on mothers, children and other family members. These effects can be variously psychological, physical and social.

5. **Work to address women's trauma needs to happen in the community** – the criminal justice system has been shown to be trauma-creating in itself, and is adding to marginalised women's difficult life experiences. More support in the community as a diversion from custody is crucial, as evidenced by this research, particularly in the following areas:
    o Better support for women who have children taken into care who may be at risk of offending. The period after a child is removed from the family is a significant period, when women may turn to drugs and alcohol to cope with their feelings. This can lead to offending.
    o Intimate partner violence continues to be prevalent in all areas of society with women involved in the CJS being particularly likely to have experienced it. IPV also continues to be the reason why some women's children have been removed to the care of social services (see previous point). Recognition is needed that IPV can be a direct or in-direct cause of women's offending behaviour.
    o Increased awareness of the impact of post-natal depression and puerperal psychosis on women's mental health and subsequent

offending behaviour. More support is required to identify this and intervene in a timely manner to avoid the escalation of problems.

- o Bereavement and loss was a particular feature of many of the mother's lives in this research. Lack of social supports make these experiences harder to process, leading to other issues.

6. More **detailed information about the process of sentencing**, timescales and the likelihood of receiving a custodial sentence needs to be given to women, and particularly mothers. The practice of suggesting that custody is unlikely means it causes even greater problems when it does happen, as mothers and families are not prepared. Mothers need to be given the opportunity to make arrangements for children, before being escorted to prison. It may be possible in many cases to have a delay for mothers or solely dependent fathers between sentencing and entering custody, in order for them to make childcare arrangements. Support for mothers pre-sentencing would also be beneficial due to the stress that is placed on the family during this time as evidenced by this research. The Farmer report (Farmer, 2019) advocates for a lead professional to ensure pre-sentence support for women to help prepare them for imprisonment, but policy change has been slow to occur.

7. As detailed by the research study, visits continue to be underused and are, in some cases, traumatic for mothers and children. There needs to be more consideration of the **barriers to visits** taking place, as well as the specific needs of families with children with disabilities or SEN, and how they can be supported. Further research would be beneficial to understand in more detail the issues surrounding visits and how best to promote the maintenance of contact and family ties.

8. During custody, **financial support for kinship carers** is vitally needed in order that they can properly care for any children they are responsible for. Carers are in many cases unable to continue with their employment, particularly if the children are very young. Older children will incur more cost in terms of clothing, food and school uniform.

9. **Housing** continues to be a major problem for women who have been in custody. Practitioners reported the difficulty they had in securing appropriate accommodation for women. Mixed-sex hostels were deemed particularly problematic. There were also issues for women leaving custody regarding not being entitled to apply for council housing but not having the funds or guarantors to secure private housing.

10. A number of the women spoken to felt that there was a lack of **support, post-custody,** and one was hoping to set up her own support network for this purpose. One possibility would be for new prison leavers to have a specific group, within the probation sessions they attend to get help with problems they may be facing, share experiences and begin to deal with what they have been through. This could include both elements of peer support and targeted services visiting the session to provide information. It is fairly well evidenced that support from people who have gone through similar experiences, and knowing you are not alone is an important way of dealing with traumatic experiences.

9.7.2 A final note

On a final note, regarding what needs to change, the primary improvement that the mothers who took part in the study felt was needed was that they wanted to be listened to:

> "*They just sentence you, the system, they don't want to know your story, and everybody's got a story behind what they've done...and they should really sit back and listen to that.*" **Cheryl**

> "*I think they need to listen to people more: understand what's going on rather than just categorise people; listen to the person, what they say, what the situation is.*" **Angela**

Appendices

Appendix 1: Approval letter from HMPPS NRC

22nd March 2019

APPROVED SUBJECT TO MODIFICATIONS

Ref: 2019-083

Title: The Impact of imprisonment on mothers: Identifying strengths and coping strategies

Dear Miss Mitchell

Further to your application to undertake research across HMPPS, the National Research Committee (NRC) is pleased to grant approval in principle for your research. The Committee has requested the following modifications:

- The language in the information sheets/consent forms should be changed to reflect that the research is being conducted in XXXX CRC and not a prison.

- The research report should reflect how long the participants have been in the community and the implications of this in terms of an individual's experiences.

Before the research can commence you must agree formally by email to the NRC (National.Research@NOMS.gsi.gov.uk), confirming that you accept the modifications set out above and will comply with the terms and conditions outlined below.

Please note that unless the project is commissioned by MoJ/HMPPS and signed off by Ministers, the decision to grant access to prison establishments, National Probation Service (NPS) divisions or Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) areas (and the offenders and practitioners within these establishments/divisions/areas) ultimately lies with the Governing Governor/Director of the establishment or the Deputy Director/Chief Executive of the NPS

division/CRC area concerned. If establishments/NPS divisions/CRC areas are to be approached as part of the research, a copy of this letter must be attached to the request to prove that the NRC has approved the study in principle. The decision to grant access to existing data lies with the Information Asset Owners (IAOs) for each data source and the researchers should abide by the data sharing conditions stipulated by each IAO.

Please note that a MoJ/HMPPS policy lead may wish to contact you to discuss the findings of your research. If requested, your contact details will be passed on and the policy lead will contact you directly.

Please quote your NRC reference number in all future correspondence.

Yours sincerely,

Sinead Bloomfield (on behalf of)

National Research Committee

Can you help? Do you have children?

Have you been to prison?

Participants needed for research on what prison is like for women with children.

I would like to talk to mothers about their experiences of prison.

- ✓ How did you cope?
- ✓ How has it affected your family?
- ✓ All responses will be anonymous

Please talk to your probation officer or XXXXXXXXXX co-ordinator if you would like to take part.

Sophie Mitchell-Researcher

Northumbria University NEWCASTLE

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET: The Impact of Imprisonment on Mothers

You have been invited to take part in a research study. Before you agree to take part, please read the following information. If you do not understand anything or have any questions, please ask the researcher at any point.

Project purpose
The main aim of the research is to better understand how mothers and their children are affected by prison. I am interested in the issues facing mothers in prison and how their prior life experiences have affected them.

Who is doing this research?
I am a PhD student at Northumbria University. My name is Sophie Mitchell.

Do I have to take part?
No, it is up to you whether or not you agree to take part. If you do decide to take part, you can withdraw at any time.

What do I have to do?
You will be interviewed by the researcher. The interview will last for about 45 minutes. Interviews will focus on your experiences of working with mothers who have been in prison and their families. The interviews will be recorded.

What are the possible risks to taking part?
You can say as much or as little as you want to in the interview. All responses will be anonymised.

What are the benefits of taking part?
You will get the chance to share your knowledge and experience in order to add to data about women in prison and help to make changes.   There will be a one-day conference and dissemination event at the end of the research project.

What will happen to the information I give?
The information will be used for the research project. It may be used in publications. None of the information you provide will be used in a way that could identify you. This means that we will agree during the interview how to record your role in such a way that you cannot be identified.

Who is funding it?
The research is funded by Lady Edwina Grosvenor who does a lot of work in and for prisons, particularly for women.

Who has ethically approved the research?
The research has been approved by Northumbria University and HMPPS.

What do I do if I something goes wrong?
If you want to make a complaint, you can contact me directly or alternatively my supervisor Prof. Pamela Davies.

For more information please contact Sophie Mitchell
sophie2.mitchell@northumbria.ac.uk

Appendix 4: Consent form for practitioners

Criminology
Department of Arts, Design & Social Sciences

Northumbria University
NEWCASTLE

Sophie Mitchell
Phd Research Student
Sophie2.mitchell@northumbria.ac.uk

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

The Impact of Imprisonment on Mothers

Please initial e box

1	I have had the project explained to me by the researcher and been given an information sheet.	
2	I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
3	I am willing to be interviewed and give permission for my interview to be audio-recorded and notes to be taken.	
4	I give permission to be quoted (by use of false name).	
5	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without any adverse consequences.	
6	I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	
7	I understand how this research will be written up and published.	
8	I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.	
9	I agree to take part in the study.	

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____
Name of person taking consent   Date   Signature

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET: The Impact of Imprisonment on Mothers

You have been invited to take part in a research study. Before you agree to take part, please read the following information. If you do not understand anything or have any questions, speak to myself (Sophie Mitchell) or your Probation Officer.

Project purpose
The main aim of the research is to better understand how mothers and their children are affected by prison. I am interested in peoples' stories of how they came to be in prison and how they and their families have coped with prison.

Who is doing this research?
I am a PhD student at Northumbria University. My name is Sophie Mitchell.

Do I have to take part?
No, it is up to you whether or not you agree to take part. If you do decide to take part you can withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

What do I have to do?
You will be interviewed by the researcher. The interview will last for about an hour. Interviews will focus on your experiences of prison, your life before prison and how you have coped with this. The interviews will be recorded.

What are the possible risks to taking part?
You can say as much or as little as you want in the interview. There is a risk that you may become upset talking about what has happened to you. If this happens we can stop the interview or take a break. I can refer you to someone who can give you support if needed.

What are the benefits of taking part?
You will get a chance to tell your story of how you came to prison and how you have coped with this. Your story will add to data about women in prison and help to make changes. Taking part will not change your sentence or probation order in any way.

What will happen to the information I give?
The information will be used for the research project, only the researcher and their supervisor will have access to the data. It may be used in publications. None of the information you provide will be used in a way that could identify you. This means that a false name will be given to each participant.
If there are concerns for your safety confidentiality will be broken, but where possible you will be informed of this.

Who is funding it?
The research is funded by Lady Edwina Grosvenor who does a lot of work in and for prisons, particularly for women.

Who has ethically approved the research?
The research has been approved by Northumbria University and HMPPS.

What do I do if I something goes wrong?
If you want to make a complaint or withdraw from the study, you can contact a member of staff at your organisation who will then get in touch with the research team. The member of staff you can contact is your Probation Officer/Hub staff.

For more information please speak to your Probation Officer/Centre staff.

Appendix 6: Consent form for mothers

Criminology
Department of Arts, Design & Social Sciences

Northumbria University
NEWCASTLE

Sophie Mitchell
Phd Research Student
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PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

The Impact of Imprisonment on Mothers

Please initial e box

1	I have had the project explained to me by the researcher and been given an information sheet.	
2	I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
3	I am willing to be interviewed and give permission for my interview to be audio-recorded and notes to be taken.	
4	I give permission to be quoted (by use of false name).	
5	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that by taking part in this study I should not feel stress over and above that experienced in everyday life. If I do I understand that I can take a break or withdraw at any time.	
6	I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	
7	I understand how this research will be written up and published.	
8	I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.	
9	I agree to take part in the study.	

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____
Name of person taking consent   Date   Signature

GDPR amendment: Any data collected including any recordings will be held securely and destroyed according to data protection agreements. Data will only be accessible to the researcher and their supervisor and will not be made public. Anonymous excerpts only will be used in documents made public. Data will be retained under the condition that any subsequent use will be restricted to research projects that have gained ethical approval from Northumbria University.

Appendix 7: Interview guide (practitioners)

Interview schedule (Staff)

Preliminary checks:

Interviews will be informal and relatively unstructured, below is a guide in case of requiring prompts and to indicate potential themes that will be discussed.

- Can you tell me about your current role?

- What do you think are the main issues when working with women who have been in prison?

- How do you think that women's prior life experiences have impacted on their pathway to prison? Do you think 'trauma' is a part of this?

- Do you think that the experience of prison is positive or negative for mothers? Why?

- How do you feel about mothers being separated from their children in prison? What effect do you think this has on mothers, children?

- How do you work with women to maintain family ties?

- What difficulties do you think mothers face when they come out of prison?

- What sources of support are available for women on leaving prison? Is there enough?

- Do you think there are wider social and structural issues that impact on women who have offended?

- What improvements, if any, do you think are needed to support women with children involved in the Criminal justice System?

Appendix 8: Interview guide (mothers with experience of prison)

Preliminary checks:

1. **Introduce self and role.**
2. **Check & explain informed consent/understanding of research – check okay to go ahead.**
3. **Explain can stop at any time or not answer a question.**
4. **Remind of circumstances when confidentiality will be broken – if researcher is made aware of an intention to harm self or others.**
5. **Inform of how to make a complaint about the research process.**
6. **Inform of available support in case of emotional distress.**

Interviews will be informal and relatively unstructured, below is a guide in case of requiring prompts and to indicate potential themes that will be discussed.

1. Coming to prison/pathway to prison

How did you come to be in prison?

Is this the first time?

What was happening in your life at this time?

2. Experience of prison

What happened when you first came to prison?

What's the hardest part of being in prison?

How have you been in yourself while in prison?

How has prison affected the way you feel?

3. Separation from children/family

Can you tell me about when you became a parent?

How many children/ages etc.

Were you living with them before you came into prison this time?

What happened when you came into prison?

Where are they now?

Do they visit you in prison?

How have they been since you've been in prison?

What effect do you think prison has had on your relationship with your children?

4. Coping strategies/support

How do you cope emotionally with being in prison?

What support have you received while in prison?

How do you cope with not seeing your family and children?

What would help you to cope better?

5. Hopes for the future

What are your plans for when you leave prison?

(home/work/family)

Is there anything I haven't asked you about that you would like to talk about or think I should be asking the people I listen to in the future?

6.Debrief/ how are you feeling?

Do you have any questions?

Do you need further support around anything we have discussed?

Are you happy with the way the interview went?

Appendix 9: Table of interviewees

Interview	Age	Sentence	Time served	Offence	Children	Who cared for?	Historic?
1 Lisa	40s	5 years 2 months	18 months	Fraud and using false docs.	1 (son)	Grandma	Recent
2 Kerry	30s	2 years 11 months	13 months	Conspiracy to pervert the course of justice	3 (daughter, son, daughter)	Grandma/ Sister	Recent
3 Samantha	40s	2 years 4 mths	10 months	Fraud.	2 (sons)	Grandma	Recent
4 Sarah		Probation, unpaid work	None	Drink driving	2	Dad	NA
5 Andrea	40s	Remand and suspended	3 weeks?	Possession of drugs/intent.	1 (son)	Grandma	Historic
6 Tanya	40s	10 months	3 months?	Taking drugs into prison.	2 (sons)	Ex-partner (dad).	Recent
7 Diane		14 weeks	7 weeks	Drink driving	1 (daughter)	Sister	Recent
8 Bianca	30s	Suspended	3.5 months	Breach of suspended-theft	3 and pregnant	Grandma	Recent
9 Angela	40s	12 months	6 months	Arson w. intent	1 (son)	Ex-partner	Historic
10 Laura	40s	3 months?	6 months	Street robbery	3 boys 1 girl now, 1 baby boy then	Partner	Historic
11 Cheryl	40s	3 months	7 weeks	Affray	1 (son)	Grandma	Historic
12 Danielle	30s	6 months	3 months		1 (daughter)	Grandma	Recent
13 Stacey	30s	3 years	12 months	Fraud	1 (daughter)	Grandma/ sisters	Recent
14 Linda	60s	6 months	45 days	Fraud	1 (daughter)	Grandparents	Historic
15 Naomi		25 months	8 months	Fraud	2 (sons)	Husband	Recent
16 Janette	40s	12 weeks	6 weeks	Neighbour dispute, intimidation	2 (sons)	Dad.	Recent
17 Caitlin	20s	20 months	12 months	Drugs	1 (daughter)	Grandparents.	Recent
18 Alison	40s	3 years 4 months	16 months	Fraud	2 (sons)	Grandfather	Recent
19 Tammy		4 years	2 years	Robbery	2 (daughters)	Foster care	Recent
20 Alicia	30s	17 months	13 weeks	Perverting the course of justice.	1 (son)	Dad, grandma	Recent

Appendix 10: Mindmap of interview issues (practitioners)

Appendix 11: Mindmap of interview issues (women)

Mothers' interviews

sentencing/court
- told wouldnt get custody
- long wait, stress
- going through on own

coming out
- mixed feelings, want to go back
- difficulty regaining mother role
- conflict with caregiver
- anxiety/panic attacks
- financial issues
- fear of other/stigma
- children fearful you'll go away again

Prison experience
- noise
- camaraderie?
- not understanding how things work
- drugs...
- terrifying
- no problem!
- traumatizing
- big mix low/high risk
- chained up for hosp appts
- first time away from children

effect on children
- alcohol misuse
- anger
- wanting it to go away
- not leaving side
- not wanting to come home
- violence towards others
- suicidal feelings
- hating me for it
- distant
- school exclusion
- Irreparable damge
- loss of respect for police/authority

offending
- male coercion to offend
- relief when it can stop/found out
- stress of waiting to go to court
- as a form of self-punishment

Narratives of...
- I'm a good mum...
- I have to move on...
- I can't get this time back...
- Minimising the effects?

Prison visits
- Not wanting to tell child in prison
- wanting visits but wanting to protect child
- repeated seperation too much
- children w. additional needs not catered for

Seperation
- Pain
- Can't be a mum
- Permanent child removal (and fear of)
- Time you can't get back
- Bitterness/anger
- Birthdays/Xmas missed
- Bonding worries
- Missing changes/growing up
- emotional connection gone

Mental health
- Anxiety pre/during/post
- personality disorder
- depression
- psychosis, paranoia
- self-harm
- suicide attempts
- insomnia
- PTSD
- PND

Housing
- Homelessness
- Losing housing

Drugs & alcohol

Financial issues
- difficulty getting a job
- losing job/income
- Financial pressure for material goods?

Family
- Harder for those on outside?
- Relationship with new primary caregiver
- Stigma
- Absent fathers
- child custody issues
- worry
- fear of rejection
- let people down

Stigma
- Press
- Internet/social media
- Community
- Family

Prior-Trauma
- Domestic abuse
  - forced pregnancy
  - child removal
- child abuse
- stillbirth
- Postpartum psychosis
- child removal
- growing up in care
- miscarriage
- relationship breakdown
- loss of parent

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