Prisoners' Families Research : Developments, Debates and Directions

Introduction

After many years of relative obscurity, research on prisoners' families has gained significant momentum. It has expanded from case-oriented descriptive analyses of family experiences to longitudinal studies of child and family development and even macro analyses of the effects on communities in societies of mass incarceration. Now the field engages multi-disciplinary and international interest although it arguably still remains on the periphery of mainstream criminological, psychological and sociological research agendas. This chapter discusses developments in prisoners' families' research and its positioning in academia and practice. It does not aim to provide an all-encompassing review of the literature rather it will offer some reflections on how and why the field has developed as it has and on its future directions. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first discusses reasons for the historically small body of research on prisoners' families and for the growth in research interest over the past two decades. The second analyses patterns and shifts in the focus of research studies and considers how the field has been shaped by intersecting disciplinary interests of psychology, sociology, criminology and socio-legal studies. The final part reflects on substantive and ethical issues that are likely to shape the direction of prisoners' families' research in the future.

I   From 'out of sight' to 'in mind'

For much of the twentieth century, prisoners' families (defined as the partner and children of prisoners) received only marginal research interest (Murray 2005, Comfort 2007, Smith 2014). The small number of studies published drew attention to their social invisibility and the hardships they experienced. Prisoners' families were called 'hidden' or 'forgotten'

victims (Bakker, Morris, and Janus 1978, Matthews 1983, Cunningham and Baker 2003). In contrast over the past 25 years there has been a dramatic increase in numbers of publications. A SCOPUS search revealed a ten-fold increase in articles and books on 'prisoners' families' from 1990 to 2015. However, the increase is not evenly spread across countries. The large majority of publications originated from the US and the UK; a number were from Australia, Canada and Western Europe; and – as in other fields of criminology - there were few from Eastern Europe, Asia, South America and Africa.

Looking at countries which have seen a growth of research, it is difficult to know for sure why prisoners' families attracted little academic interest for so long. Our review of attempts to explain the omission points to four factors: state-aligned orientations of mainstream criminological research, individual interests and motivations of criminological researchers and practitioners with influence, social policy and related sociological theorising concerning the individual and consumer society, and the social stigmatisation of prisoners' families.

Assumptions about what falls within the remit of criminological research are a likely contributing factor to the invisibility of prisoners' families to the research gaze. In particular, the limitations of a research field which has positioned itself alongside the state's perspective on criminal justice have been highlighted. If the process of custodial sentencing is conceived of as a binary activity in which the state convicts an offender, then the offender's family is systemically 'out of sight'. As Matthews (1991) commented, *'Prisoners families…remain out in the cold. No agency has any statutory responsibilities towards them…they are just not on anybody's agenda'* (1991:8). Wilson-Croome (1991) stated that probation officers in the UK did not view offenders' families and their children as part of their responsibilities and would not have felt qualified to provide support: *'Many probation officers.. 'would neither see it as*

their key role to work with the children of the family nor feel confident that they have the skills and experience to do so' (1991:41). This has been partially due to the fragmentation of social services but research communities which worked to the priorities of policy makers were not therefore likely to consider the experiences of prisoners' families as a mainstream research topic. Critiques of the criminal justice system's narrow focus on offence and offender have been made across several jurisdictions e.g. Germany (Römer,1967), the US (Comfort, 2007), Denmark (Smith, 2014) and the UK (Lanskey et al, 2018).

Alongside state-oriented mind-sets of criminologists the interests and concerns of people occupying influential positions in research and practice may also have played a role. Heidensohn (1985) cites WH Whyte's acknowledgment that he did not include the family in his analysis of "Street Corner Society" because it was just not as exciting for him in comparison to other avenues of inquiry: *'for quite unscientific reasons I have always found politics, rackets and gangs more interesting than the basic unit of human society'* (Whyte, 1955 in Heidensohn, 1985:131). Shaw (1991) recounts a comment by a senior criminal justice practitioner that the criminal justice system had more important concerns than prisoners' children: *'To talk about prisoners' children when we should be out there fighting crime is cotton wool'* (1989:27). Of course, this is only a single voice, but exemplifies how researchers who attempted to raise the profile of prisoners' families were faced with the challenge of igniting the interests of many senior academics and practitioners.

Further conjecture about the limited concern with the experiences of prisoners' families draws on sociological and feminist analyses of wider trends in society, namely the diminishing social influence of the family and the low status accorded to domestic and caring work traditionally associated with women. In her study of prisoners' families in England,

Morris (1965) echoing the theorising of Parsons (1951) referred to the declining social status and influence of the family and the increased focus on the individual. She noted the argument that a shift in the family's function from a unit of production to a unit of consumption had brought with it a focus on the individuals within the family rather than on the family itself. Policy interest was directed towards individual family members and their capacities as wage-earners and consumers. Yeatman (1986) argued that sociological theorising had played its role in this orientation away from the family as a unit of analysis because of its tendency to analyse in terms of a dichotomy between the individual and society. Through this theoretical lens, the family is often subsumed within the wider category of 'community' and partially loses its identity as a distinctive subject of study (see Yeatman, 1986).

The low social and economic value accorded to domestic and caring work and the associated status of women in society may also have contributed to the lack of concern for prisoners' families. Aungles (1994) argued that the role and function of caring had been undervalued in public discourse because of the conflation of 'caring about' and 'caring for'. The merging of these terms masked the *'significant material aspects of the work of caring'* involved in ensuring the physical and emotional well-being for the person being cared for. As a result, the economic contribution of caring was not one that was recognised and engaged with in the consumer-oriented economic thinking of the time. Seen from this perspective, the family-related hardships facing women and children (the majority configuration of prisoners' families) would likely be a minority research interest.

Limited social and political engagement in family matters may also be partly attributable to the politics of liberalism and related ideological distinctions between the public and the

private spheres of society. Family life belonged to the private sphere, a space for personal freedom. It was not considered to fall within the remit of public policy, hence the concept of 'laissez-faire' (Yeatman, 1986). Where social issues needed to be addressed the trend was not for the state to work with families but to intervene and take over the family's traditional roles e.g. of education and welfare (Morris, 1965).

The dynamics of social stigmatisation may also have contributed to a lack of social, political and parallel academic concern with prisoners' families. Not infrequently, families were considered to be undeserving of help because they were associated with the imprisoned parent and the crime committed. Seen as complicit in an offending lifestyle, their eligibility for social support was considered to be less than others: *'poverty is part of the punishment these families deserve'* (Morris,1965:10). These attitudes may be seen as part of the wider 'populist punitiveness' that Bottoms (1995) identified and the associated concept of 'responsibilisation' (Garland 1996) of the offender: *'It must surely be the father's responsibility to think of the consequences of his actions'* (Shaw, 1991:27). Aware of their social stigmatisation and faced with the potential of hostile social responses many prisoners' families have kept themselves away from the public eye and have not actively sought support for fear of ostracism and victimisation (Lanskey et al, 2018). In response to anticipated and actual hostility from others, prisoners families as a group have been little inclined to catch the attention of policy makers or researchers.

Obviously, there have been several intersecting social phenomena which may have contributed to the limited research interest in prisoners' families, some are specific to their situation others are related to broader social and political trends. It may also have been a question of number: prisoners' families were a minority social group and any detrimental

effects of imprisonment they experienced were of little social significance. This argument is reinforced by observations of reactions to the rapid and uneven expansion of prison populations globally in the 21st century. Although many of the factors discussed above have resonance still today, research and policy interest in prisoners' families have increased in countries which have witnessed a growth in imprisonment rates: in the US, Oceania and various European countries (see Walmsley, 2016). With mass incarceration came recognition that many more families were 'living in the shadow of prison' and related calls to understand the wider ramifications of this new and significant social phenomenon: "*research is needed to assess more systematically the losses in human and social capital… Until this research is undertaken in a serious and systematic way, the potential impact of the incarceration of parents on children will remain an unrecognized and therefore neglected consideration in the policy framework that surrounds the increased reliance on imprisonment...*" (Hagan and Dinovitzer 1999: 123). In response to such appeals, the field of prisoners' families' research has grown and diversified substantially in many countries with mass incarceration over the past twenty years. There remain however countries with high imprisonment rates, where there is very little recorded research on prisoners families. A possible barrier to dissemination may be the language of the research publication, however the absence of state interest and punitive public opinion are also cited as factors (see for example, Liu et al, 2009 on the lack of government concern in China, and Pallot and Katz, 2014, on public attitudes towards parent offenders in the Russian Federation).

II   Generating insights: developments in prisoners' families' research

This section charts some of the principal routes of enquiry of research on prisoners' families. It distinguishes between intrinsic and instrumental research interests; the former addresses the experiences and consequences of imprisonment for families, and the latter investigates the

contribution of families in supporting prisoners during and after their prison sentence. Within each of these two broad categories of enquiry there are distinct sub-groups and across the research field as a whole there are common interests in identifying diversity and understanding context.

1) Intrinsic Research Interests

Many of the earliest studies described above were concerned with documenting the experiences of imprisonment for families and children and raising awareness of the hardships they faced. Subsequent studies in this primarily psycho-social line of enquiry have focussed on identifying the risks associated with negative outcomes of parental imprisonment and factors that protect against these risks. A more recent group of studies with intrinsic interests has had a sociological orientation and theorised the experiences of prisoners' families from the perspectives of penal power, punishment and social justice.

Risks of Imprisonment for Families and Protective Factors

A large strand of research on prisoners' families has been concerned with the negative effects of imprisonment on families. The earliest studies were cross-sectional in design and described families' material living conditions and lifestyles, health and welfare, personal and social relationships, support networks and contact with the criminal justice system. These studies documented a range of difficulties for families which were collectively termed 'collateral consequences of imprisonment' (Tonry and Petersilia 1999, Hagan and Dinovitzer 1999). They illustrated how family relationships could be strained by the separation (McDermott & King, 1992; Noble, 1995) and highlighted the stresses associated with single parenthood (Morris, 1965). They documented how the family home could be lost, particularly when mothers were imprisoned, as children were taken into care or sent to live with relatives

(Caddle and Crisp, 1997). The studies consistently revealed the financial and material deprivations families endured when the imprisoned parent was the main income earner. These difficulties continued after release due to the challenges of finding employment with a criminal record (Braman, 2004, Naser & Visher, 2006). Research has also highlighted the frequent social stigmatisation and isolation of families of prisoners (Hagan and Dinovitzer, 1999, Miller, 2003) and a range of emotional and mental health problems associated with the stresses they experience (Fishman, 1990, Wildeman, Schnittker and Turney, 2012).

A sub-set of these studies has focussed particularly on understanding the outcomes of parental imprisonment for children. They have found that children can suffer from anxiety and depression associated with parental separation (Murray and Murray, 2010) and often experience emotional ambivalence and stress about the imprisonment (Boswell, 2002). They have recorded experiences of stigmatisation and bullying by peers at school during and after the parent's imprisonment (e.g. Boswell 2002, Pugh, 2004). They have highlighted detrimental effects of little or no contact with the imprisoned parent (Edin, Nelson, & Paranal, 2004, Lanskey et al, 2016) and the detrimental effects of long prison sentences (Hairston, 1989, Arditti et al, 2003). Studies across criminal justice jurisdictions continue to document little change in the hardships that prisoners' families experience (e.g. Lösel et al 2012; Comfort 2016; Oldrup and Frederksen, 2018).

In order to distinguish between imprisonment-induced and pre-existing problems and strains resulting from separation by imprisonment in comparison to other forms of separation, researchers have drawn on data from longitudinal studies such as the Cambridge Study for Delinquency Development, the Pittsburgh Youth Study or the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study. These studies have measured family circumstances, personal well-being

and relationships before, during and after imprisonment and also included comparison groups of families from similar socio-economic contexts who experienced separation for other reasons e.g. hospitalisation or death (Murray and Farrington, 2008). Longitudinal analyses have been undertaken in countries other than the UK and US, e.g. the Netherlands (Besemer et al, 2011, Rakt et al, 2012), Sweden (Murray et al, 2007) and meta-analyses have been conducted to identify the collective impact of imprisonment from smaller-scale studies. Researchers have investigated the potential effects on parental (mainly paternal) imprisonment on children's behaviour, mental health, school achievement, drug use and involvement in the criminal justice system (e.g. Murray, Loeber, & Pardini, 2012, Murray, Farrington & Sekol, 2012, Wakefield and Wildeman, 2014). Although causal links are difficult to establish, Murray, Farrington & Sekol (2012) have identified behavioural problems as a consistent outcome across studies and Wakefield and Wilderman (2014:24) have concluded that parental incarceration often 'makes a bad situation worse'.

While the overall picture has been shown to be negative, it is not uniformly so. For example some associations have been found between parental imprisonment and child criminal convictions (Bijleveld & Wijkman, 2009), but there is variation across countries: parental imprisonment predicted offending in sons (but not daughters) in England, but not the Netherlands (Besemer et al., 2011). However, Rakt et al (2012) found a relationship between fathers' imprisonment and child convictions in the Netherlands especially when the child was under 12 years. In Sweden, measures of parental criminality predicted children's offending better than parental imprisonment (Murray, Janson & Farrington, 2007). Researchers have surmised the mixed findings could be due to national variations in social attitudes, responses to ex-prisoners, differences in the characteristics of prison populations, and the respective family care systems. Cumulatively this body of research has highlighted the importance of

taking into account national and social contexts and penal policy for understanding the effects of imprisonment.

A complementary strand of research has aimed to identify factors that safeguard against negative outcomes of parental imprisonment. These studies have investigated the protective impact of family relationships and social support networks and have found that strong, supportive and accepting family relationships before prison can endure through the prison sentence and beyond (e.g. Hairston, 1995; Morris, 1965; Nelson, Deess and Allen, 1999, Lösel et al, 2012). Support from other community members and organisations has been found to be significant too (e.g. Lösel and Bender, 2003; Visher et al., 2004) although not all families access formal support (Lösel et al, 2012). More recently studies exploring protective factors have moved from considering the role of individual factors to a more holistic analysis of their cumulative impact. These analyses have considered resilience to adversity at an individual level (e.g Markson, Lamb and Lösel 2016) and at a family level (e.g Arditti, 2015).

Within each of these strands there have been studies which have added nuance to knowledge of the effects of imprisonment, such as the differential outcomes for children of having a mother or father in prison; the impact of particular convictions e.g. sex offending (Condry, 2007), drug offences (Allard, 2012,) and long and short term sentences on family life (Andersen 2016). Other studies have documented race-specific experiences of imprisonment in some countries, for example, in the US (see Hagan and Dinovitzer, 1999, Wakefield and Wildeman, 2014) or in Australia (see Halsey, 2010, Dennison et al, 2014). The importance of taking both race and gender into account has been highlighted by Thomas and Christian

(2018) in their analysis of Black women's experiences of imprisonment and of supporting others in prison in the US.

The heterogeneity of prisoners' families experiences identified in this body of research has signalled a need to be cautious about too general assumptions about what constitutes 'good practice' with regards to prisoners' children and families (Knudsen, 2016). Similar to research on the 'cycle of violence' in abused children (Widom et al, 2015), this group of research studies suggest that different developmental pathways are due to the interplay of risk and protective factors and processes of resilience (Lösel & Bender, 2017b). Such differentiation has also highlighted the importance of understanding the multiple layers of influence on family life. Some studies have specifically adopted a psychosocial analytical framework drawing on Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (see for example, Poehlmann et al, 2010, Arditti, 2005) to capture the range of micro-, meso- and macro-level influences.

Penal Power, Punishment and Social Justice

There is a long history of prisoners' families' research explicitly concerned with social inequality and matters of social justice (e.g Bloodgood, 1928, Wakefield and Wildeman, 2014). In 1928, Ruth Bloodgood in her review of a study of prisoners' families in Kentucky, US, argued that society was in neglect of its duties as a result of its individualistic concern with the offender only: '*in all our machinery for the discipline and reformation of the prisoner the obligation of society to his wife and children has been completely ignored*' (1928: 534-5).

Since Bloodgood's critique of the state's role, a large body of research on prisoners families has drawn attention to the social inequalities they experience and commented on the

inadequacy of existing government policy. It reveals how the poorest groups in society are often most affected by imprisonment. Wakefield and Wildeman, (2014) for example, identified racial disparities in the experiences of children of prisoners in the US because outcomes were generally worse for African American children. They said that the absence of a consideration of parental imprisonment in research on child well-being had obscured *'the most powerful effects of high incarceration rates on inequality today and in the future'* (2014:5). Western and Pettit (2010) contended that the prison itself was implicated in the destabilising of already fragile families and communities for it exacerbated the difficulties of finding employment and maintaining strong family ties. Condry (2018) in her analysis of the ways in which prison produces and reproduces disadvantage for the families of prisoners argued for acknowledgement of prisoners' families as citizens in their own right, not just as prison visitors.

A similar social justice orientation is to be found in socio-legal research studies on the rights of prisoners' families and of prisoners' children particularly. These studies have identified how sentencers in many jurisdictions (England and Wales, Scotland, US, Ireland) take minimal account of the impact of parental imprisonment on children and families (e.g Minson, 2015, Loucks and Loureiro, 2018, Donson and Parkes, 2016, Abramowicz 2012, Andersen 2015). These and other authors have referred to rights framework benchmarks such as the UK's Human Rights Act (1998) and the United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child (1989). They have draw attention to systemic restrictions on when and how children's needs can be considered in decisions to impose a custodial sentence and to practical issues related to the availability of sufficient information to allow sentencers to take their interests into account (Minson et al. 2015 and Epstein, 2014). They have also highlighted the challenge of applying children's rights at critical times such as when children

witness the arrest of a parent or want to visit an imprisoned parent (Smith, 2014). These studies have proposed ways to address current limitations in upholding children's rights for example through the introduction of child impact statements in court (Donson and Parkes, 2016) or children's officers in prisons (Smith, 2014).

A related and more recent strand of research has been concerned with the sociology of punishment and drawn attention to its collateral consequences with reference to concepts of penal power and punishment (Condry and Smith, 2018). Researchers have analysed how the state's deployment of penal power shapes the lives of imprisoned parents and their families and alters relationships, roles within the family and support networks. They have charted the experiences of families' direct contact with the prison in particular visiting the parent in prison, travelling to and from prison (Christian, 2005), the impact of the carceral space of the visits hall on parenting practice (Moran, 2013, Hutton, 2016) and the security procedures and the rules and regulations they are subjected to on visits (Comfort, 2003). Comfort (2003) illustrates how women with partners in prison undergo a process of 'secondary prisonization'. This process can be painful, as women are subjected to deprivations of agency during visits, but the partner's imprisonment may also generate opportunities for women to establish greater control and stability in the relationship (e.g. Souza et al, this volume). Cumulatively, these studies illustrate how family relationships *are interwoven with overlapping penal and social powers which prioritise 'discipline, authority and surveillance'* (Granja et al, 2015:1216). Of course, there can be security reasons for a restrictive visit scheme, but the respective rules are not always clear and general across institutions. In these environments family contact is often defined as a privilege rather than a right and can be restricted if prisoners or their families do not comply with regulations (Granja et al, 2015).

Research has documented too the punitive reach of penal power into the lives of families beyond the prison (Comfort, 2007, Lanskey et al, 2018, Kotova, 2014, Touraut, 2012. Lanskey et al (2018) conceptualising the hardships that families experience as a result of the parent's prison sentence as 'referred pains of imprisonment.' These acute and chronic pains are associated with the 'depth', 'weight', 'breadth', and 'tightness' of penal power (see Crewe, 2011) and are argued to be evidence of 'punishment creep': the over-reach of state punishment 'beyond the legal offender'(Comfort, 2007).

Reflecting a broader 'turn to parenting' as a result of individual, micro- and macro-social factors (Daly, 2017; Lösel and Bender, 2017a), other work has explored how the roles of fathering and mothering are affected by incarceration (e.g. Boswell and Wedge, 2002, Muth and Walker, 2013, Roman, 2016, Moran et al, 2016). Studies have documented how separation from children may be stressful, and how incarceration may generate feelings of guilt of being a 'bad' parent (Clarke et al, 2005, Cunha, 2014). Research has identified how the prison environment itself may undermine or support core components of parental identity such as the roles of nurturer, caregiver and economic provider. In some studies the prison is shown to inhibit parental roles (Clarke et al, 2005). However, other studies have illustrated how the prison environment can provide opportunities for reconfiguring a parental role which had previously disintegrated. For example, Cunha (2014) describes how in prisons where mothers can be with their children, the environment may facilitate new and less pressured experiences of motherhood.

Cumulatively these studies strengthen theoretical reflections on the experiences of prisoners' families. Through their analyses of how penal and social power shape family relationships and lifestyles they render visible the reach of imprisonment beyond the incarcerated family

member. They draw critical attention to the broader social consequences of criminal justice processes and decision-making, and raise questions of social responsibility for the unfavourable consequences of imprisonment for those who have not committed a crime.

2) Instrumental Research Interests

Alongside research focussed on the interests of prisoners' families in their own right, studies in penology have examined their instrumental role in helping prisoners cope with their time in prison and with their adjustment to life outside on release. They identify the critical importance to prisoners of relationships with families and significant others, the personal and institutional benefits when these relationships are positive and supportive and the difficulties that arise when they are not. They also draw attention to the impact of prison policies on family contact.

Prisoner Survival

Families have been found to be frequently a source of strength for relatives during their time in prison; they provide comfort and emotional support to help cope with the stresses and deprivations of imprisonment and practical assistance in the form of material provisions (money, clothes, special food). Families keep their imprisoned relative in touch with their world outside (Mills and Codd, 2008) and can be a source of encouragement and hope for life after release (Maruna, 2001). The breakdown of family relationships or an absence of contact with families can conversely provoke anxiety and distress for relatives in prison. There may be moments when the imprisoned family member's vulnerabilities are heightened such as after bad news from outside or a difficult visit. These events have been linked to drug use in prisons (Farmer, 2017) and to self-harm and suicide (Liebling, 2002).

Strong relationships with families are considered to contribute to order and stability in prisons and the establishment of positive and frequent communication opportunities with families has consistently been advocated as a political priority (Woolf and Tumin 1991, Farmer, 2017). Families have been recognised as playing an important role in alerting prison staff to their relative's well-being, in particular when they are feeling very vulnerable. Contact and support with family can reduce prisoners' anxiety too, leading them to be 'less confrontational' and more responsive to authority (Dominey et al, 2016). However the power that the prison holds over family contact can increase prisoners' anxieties and frustration particularly when it is applied conditionally (Lanskey et al, 2018).

Desistance from Crime

Studies have highlighted the strong role that families can play in supporting desistance from crime (e.g. Laub and Sampson, 2001, Savolainen, 2009, Cid and Martí, 2012). They have found that close ties with partners and children support desistance in several ways: an emotional attachment to family members, a rational commitment to family life, a shared belief in conventional values and involvement in the family's daily routines which took the place of offending activities (Hirschi, 1969). Over time, the emotional, social and practical resources that are generated by family relationships have been found to help sustain a non-offending lifestyle (Laub et al, 1998) and promote resilience in resettlement (Markson et al, 2015). The (female) partners of prisoners can also make an important contribution to realistic aims and resettlement (Souza et al, 2015). The picture is not uniform however, research has highlighted that the type and quality of family ties are significant for whether they help or hinder resettlement and family functioning after the prison sentence (e.g., Hagan and Dinovitzer, 1999; Lösel and Bender, 2003; Markson et al, 2015).

The interest to maintain or improve family relationships that support desistance has generated several research evaluations of interventions to promote the parenting skills of prisoners. Programmes have been targeted specifically at mothers (Baradon et al 2008, Sandifer, 2008) and fathers in prison (Meek, 2007; Barr et al, 2014, Bradshaw et al, 2017). Where some studies have suggested beneficial outcomes of interventions e.g. Rossiter et al (2015), others have found that there may be counter-productive influences of the prison (e.g. Skar et al, 2014) and raise the question whether the process of 'prisonisation' overshadows prisoners' other social roles. These mixed findings suggest the impact of the prison context is relevant to take into account in understanding the extent to which programmes are effective.

3) Reflection

The above review has highlighted clearly the heterogeneity of prisoners' families and their experiences but also some common patterns and trends. Research has consistently documented an association between imprisonment and various forms of family hardship: material, social deprivation, emotional difficulties, mental health problems, and stigmatisation. As the demography of prisoners' families mirrors the demography of prison populations, imprisonment disproportionately affects families from social groups who are over-represented in prison populations. In many countries, e,g, the US, the UK, and Australia, families from ethnic minorities are disproportionately affected by imprisonment (see for example, Pettit and Western, 2004, Dennison et al, 2014, Lammy, 2017,) as are families who are often already socially and economically disadvantaged (Pettit and Western, 2004). Research has also highlighted the relevance of taking into account broader societal and cultural contexts, and how the policies and social attitudes they generate can amplify or constrain the stigmatising and marginalising effects of parental imprisonment.

The current field of prisoners' families' research invites three observations. First, there is much synergy across the different strands described here. Of particular note is the wide-ranging consideration of relationships between prisoners and their families from different perspectives, for example, from the prisoner, the prison, the family as a whole and individual family members (e.g children and partners). Together these studies have identified the significance of relationships for the well-being of the prisoner and family members; for the maintenance of family relationships during and after the prison sentence, for the future resettlement of the imprisoned family member, for order in prisons and in society more generally.

Second, it is interesting to consider the extent to which research has focussed on the children of prisoners reflecting criminological interests to identify risk factors for children's own involvement in the criminal justice system and sociological and psychological interests to understand the impact of parental imprisonment on children's well-being and future lifestyles. Perhaps the 'hidden victims' narrative has carried greater weight with regard to prisoners' children as it complements traditional representations of childhood innocence (Ariès, 1962). Public opinion might be more disposed to responding to children's needs than other family members and be supported too by the existence of rights frameworks such as the United Nations Rights for the Convention of the Child (1989).

Third, the review of research highlights ambivalences in the role of the state towards prisoners' families. On the one hand studies have suggested criminal justice agencies' interactions with prisoners' families may result in negative labelling and stigmatisation and raise normative questions about the adverse effects of processes of state punishment on families. Conversely studies have identified the beneficial effects that a period of

imprisonment may generate for families in terms of addressing previously negative relationships and lifestyles (Comfort, 2007). The state can have both a punitive and welfare impact on the lives of prisoners' families.

III   Extending the Field of Vision

This final section reflects on the future directions for prisoners' families' research and offers some critical reflections on the field. It describes the gaps in knowledge and understanding that remain and asks what else needs to be brought into the field of vision. It considers the spaces and shadows created by existing research designs and reflects on what is seen and what is missed by the above-mentioned analytical frameworks. Finally, it considers the implications of a normative lens for the research vision. It discusses the relationship between prisoners' family research and social justice interests from both a substantive and a methodological perspective.

Studies have identified the diversity of experiences of prisoners' families from different social groups and there is an ongoing need for greater differentiation in our understanding of different configurations of families. How do experiences of families differ with different family members in prison, with children, or siblings for example? What role does gender play, for example in the experiences of male and female partners and male and female children? What is the longer-term legacy of imprisonment? How does it affect the composition of families over time? Further questions may be asked about variations across different cultural groups and the varying influences of penal and social policies within different political, social and economic contexts. As much of the research has originated from Europe, Australia and the US, there is comparatively little understanding of the experience

and impact of imprisonment on families in Africa, South America and Asia. As in other fields replication and differentiation of knowledge is a key issue (Lösel, 2017).

Shifts in prison populations are mirrored by shifts in the demographics of prisoners' families. There are large numbers of foreign national prisoners in many European countries (Walmsley, 2016). In most countries the rate is between 25% and 50%, and in Switzerland three quarters of inmates are foreigners (Statista, 2018). The recent 'migration crisis' in Europe may further increase this trend that will have consequences for our topic: families with members incarcerated in a different country may face additional challenges, in particular, regarding contact and communication. Some of the commonly accepted findings of existing research may need to be reviewed in the light of experiences of these new groups, for example, in the role that families play in helping relatives to cope with imprisonment or desistance. In addition, the specific needs of young adult offenders require more attention (e.g. Lösel et al, 2012). Furthermore, as the average age of the prison population increases, questions arise also around the families with an elderly family member in prison. How do they cope with illness and death? To what extent are families taken into account in prison policies and practices related to end of life care? There is a need therefore for research awareness of changes in the demography of prison populations and how experiences of families may vary accordingly.

It would be inaccurate to represent the evolution of prisoners' families research as a linear trajectory, nevertheless many researchers have aimed to extend the approach of earlier studies. From a methodological perspective, longitudinal studies have deepened understanding of findings from cross-sectional studies by facilitating measurement and prediction of effects of imprisonment over time and the design of studies with control groups

has aided efforts to isolate the effects of imprisonment. The substantive focus of research has developed out of the findings of earlier studies too, for example, the shift from an analytical focus on hardships (e.g. Morris, 1965) to an analysis of resilience (e.g. Arditti, 2015, Markson et al., 2015).

It is relevant also to consider how analytical frames and definitional constructs employed in research studies might open up or close down thinking about prisoners' families. For example, recent analyses of power have been able to illuminate some of the structural dynamics affecting families that individualized psychological frameworks have not. Similarly an 'intersectionality' framework facilitates analysis of how parental imprisonment intersects with race and gender and class (Foster and Hagan, 2009). Conversely analytical frameworks might restrict ways of thinking about prisoners' families too. If research focuses on social contextual factors to what extent does it preclude consideration of individual agency? Does research on family interventions reinforce a deficit or pathological conceptualisation of prisoners' families including the family member in prison? Does the idea of intergenerational transmission of crime capture accurately the dynamics of relationships between family members? Does it present a risk for stigmatization and too narrow thinking about prisoners' families? How is "family" itself defined in a rapidly changing world of intimate relationships? Does it encompass the varying configurations of self-identified families of prisoners? Jardine (2017), for example, has advocated a broader conceptualisation of family in order that the range of people affected by imprisonment is not underestimated.

From Ruth Bloodgood's commentary in 1928 researchers have engaged with normative questions related to prisoners' families experiences. The extent to which they have overtly

engaged with a social justice agenda has varied, however. Some have considered the issue in concluding discussions and recommendations for policies, others have framed their research explicitly within a normative paradigm such as those which have conducted rights-based analyses (Minson, 2015, Donson and Parkes, 2018, Hutton, 2018, Smith, 2018). This normative dimension reflects a wider moral trend in sociological research since the beginning of the 21st century (see Feagin, 2004). A normative lens whether applied throughout a research project or in the concluding discussion invites reflection on the actions and consequences of state authority. It provides a means to challenge what Becker (1967) refers to as 'hierarchies of credibility' that are aligned with the powerful in society and to propose new approaches. Indeed, Smith argues for a research agenda that is concerned to *'inform and even create a process towards reforming state institutions and practices in the area of penal policy and practice'.*

A normative perspective also encourages consideration of how research engages with and depicts prisoners' families. To what extent does research objectify, pathologise or over-simplify prisoners' families' experiences? Are we at risk of providing insufficient support for prisoners' families or disempowering and stigmatising them further through the highlighting of deficit and difference? These questions invite reflection on the manner in which prisoners' families participate in research as well as the choice of topic, the analytical frameworks used, and the presentation and discussion of findings. Viewing decisions about research focus and methodology through a normative lens in this way helps to ensure that research is not in and of itself contributing to the social marginalisation it seeks to address.

Conclusion

As the field of prisoners' families research has gained momentum, its different forms of enquiry have highlighted multiple layers of influence on families' experiences which reach beyond the penal and into the social sphere, and have raised important questions about the role of punishment in society and intersections between criminal and social justice. Crucially research has enabled the voices of prisoners' families and children to be heard and taken into some account in criminal justice debates and political decision-making.

There is, however, still a need to capture the multiple experiences of different groups of families with different relationships in different penal contexts and to understand how their lives are shaped by their interactions with criminal justice agents and institutions. A temporal perspective is likely to be important here which identifies short and long-term effects as is an understanding of power dynamics and individual and collective agency. More broadly there is scope to analyse the societal impact on the family of growing and changing prison populations, including varying influences of social attitudes and of different penal policies and forms of imprisonment.

There is more that can be discussed on research methodology too and what is required in terms of research designs, key concepts and analytical frameworks to generate a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of experiences and outcomes. In particular, more long-term prospective research studies and controlled evaluation of programmes for prisoners' families are needed. Ethical considerations are also relevant to this discussion so that presentations of research do not objectivise families and, either directly or indirectly, contribute to social stigmatisation and marginalisation.

In terms of research aspirations to impact policy, it is cautionary to note that in the UK many of the difficulties relating to maintaining contact between prisoners highlighted in the Woolf report of 1991 are still of concern over 25 years later (Farmer, 2017) and state support for prisoners' families remains minimal in many countries. Therefore the need to continue to draw attention to the short and longer term consequences of criminal justice decision-making which positions all apart from the state and the offender on the periphery is likely to be an ongoing task for prisoners' families researchers. Many of the above points suggest the value of a stronger comparative dimension to prisoners' families' research in order that questions of similarity and difference, patterns and trends across countries and learning from interventions and policies in different contexts can be identified. Yet there is simultaneously a need to recognize contextual contingency (Godfrey et al, 2007). The horizons for prisoners' families research are therefore still wide-open.

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