Parental Imprisonment in a Changing Irish Prison System

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ABSTRACT

Parental incarceration is demonstrated to have a negative impact not only on the incarcerated parent but also their partners and families as well. Meaningful contact between the incarcerated parent and their family is shown to reduce negative impact. Consequently, there has been a rise in interventions aimed at facilitating meaningful connection as well as supporting those involved. However, reforms that do not address the needs of those involved are destined to fail. Very little research has been conducted in an Irish setting and so we know very little about the needs of the population or for that matter how they can be supported. The purpose of this thesis is to address this gap by exploring the experiences of families affected by parental incarceration in a changing Irish prison system.

Recognising the importance of meaningful family connection, many jurisdictions are providing family friendly supports in order to emphasise father over prisoner identity. However, father identity can be seen as problematic for incarcerated men, so we examine if, and how these men maintain a father identity. Paper one used semi-structured interviews with 15 incarcerated fathers to examine the construction of fatherhood in incarcerated men with children. While prison contexts influences self-categorisation by regulating enactment of parenting behaviour, the assumed nature of fatherhood legitimises the accessibility of this identity construct. Identification appears to be facilitated through a comparative process that maximises the fit between learning as a consequence of negative life trajectories and the needs and advice their children will require into the future.

Research exploring the association between parental incarceration (PI) and negative developmental outcomes for children affected often reports conflicting results. Authors using comparative cross-national analysis across Europe argue that the effects of PI are not universal but may differ across socio-political contexts. To examine the association of PI on developmental outcomes for children in an Irish context, Paper two used data from two waves of a population representative cohort study of children aged 9 years and followed up aged 13 years living in the Republic of Ireland. Children who had experienced PI came from more socially disadvantaged homes and were more likely to have experienced other stressful life events (SLE’s). After accounting for socio-demographics and other SLE’s, results indicate that there were no medium term differences in children’s self-concept. However, PI did have a medium-term association with care-giver assessments of emotional and behavioural problems.

In an effort to combat the social isolation and stigma associated with the incarceration of a family member increasingly efforts are made to support families affected by imprisonment. Many of these supports are delivered in group formats. Participation in support groups accrue benefits, sometimes referred to as the social cure, by enhancing a sense of belonging, social connection and subjective identification with the group. Where an identity is stigmatised, subjective group identification may be resisted with the knock
Paper three used semi-structured interviews with 12 partners of incarcerated men participating in a group based support, to explore their identity constructions as well as their perceptions of the value of the support group. Where an identity is stigmatised, subjective group identification may be resisted with the knock-on potential to undermine the effectiveness of group-based support. Findings emphasise the importance of shared experiences as a basis for connection with others where subjective identification with an identity is problematic.

Taken together this thesis increases our understanding of the experiences of those affected by parental incarceration, as well as our understanding of identity construction in the context of stigmatising or potentially contested identities. In doing so, this thesis addresses can inform Irish Prison Service policy by facilitating the development and maintenance of family connection and a greater understanding of the association of PI and implications for families involved.
List of Papers

1. Peer reviewed publications contained in this thesis


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Bradshaw, D., Hannigan, A., Creaven, A., & Muldoon, O.T. (Accepted). The Impact of Parental Incarceration on child behaviour and self-concept over time: Results from a population cohort study, *Child: Care, Health and Development.*
2. Peer reviewed publications not contained in the current thesis


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Conferences, Presentations, & Invited Seminars

Bradshaw, D. (2019, April). Families and imprisonment, Invited speaker, Psychology Colloquium, Department of Psychology, University of Limerick.


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Muldoon, O.T., Jay, S., Bradshaw, D., Stevenson, C., & McNamara, N. (September, 2015). *Difference is Denied: Young People’s Negotiation of Perceived Discrimination in Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Communities*. Growing up with Diversity, **Oral Presentation** at the British Psychological Society Symposium

Bradshaw, D. & Muldoon, O.T. (2015, May). *Children, Discrimination and Social Support Poster presentation* at the International Student Conference, University of Limerick

Bradshaw, D. & Muldoon, O.T. (2014, May) *Impact of Perceived Discrimination on Children Developing within Marginalised Communities*. **Poster presentation** at the 11th Annual Psychology, Health and Medicine Conference, University of Limerick, Ireland

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Honours and Awards

2019  American Society of Criminology, Division of International Criminology, Post-Graduate Student Paper, Merit Award.

2018  British Council Excellence in Science communication Award, National Finalist & Merit award,

2018  University of Limerick Thesis in Three, Faculty merit award & University Finalist

2018  Inspirefest, Innovated Research Excellence Award, National Finalist.

2017  Inspirefest, Innovated Research Excellence Award, National Finalist.

2017  University of Limerick Deans Award for Research Excellence, Departmental award & Faculty Finalist.

2015-18  Irish Research Council Post Graduate Government of Ireland Award


2014-15  EHS sPhD Fee Waiver

2014  Psychology Society of Ireland 44th Annual Conference 2014, Presentation Merit Award

2014  University of Limerick, Department of Psychology Award for Outstanding Academic Achievement.

2014  University of Limerick, Department of Psychology Award for Highest Thesis Grade.
Declaration

The substance of this thesis is the original work of the author and due reference and acknowledgment has been made, where necessary, to the work of others. No part of the thesis has been submitted in candidature for any degree.

Daragh Bradshaw

(Candidate)
Statement of Contribution- Candidate

The three studies included in this thesis have been written up for publication. As detailed below, the candidate made the substantial contribution to the three studies included in this thesis. While the candidate is fully responsible for the work presented in this thesis, the first person is used in the plural (i.e. “we” rather than “I”) to reflect the collaborative efforts guiding the research process. Since each manuscript stands alone, some information may be repeated.

The candidate under the supervision of Professor Orla Muldoon, and Dr Ann-Marie Creaven designed the research presented in each of the three papers that comprise the body of this thesis. The candidate undertook primary data collection, with the assistance of research assistants during the off-site visits. The candidate, with supervisory support from Professor Ailish Hannigan, Professor Muldoon and Dr Ann-Marie Creaven, conducted statistical analysis, interpretation of results, framing of argument and write up of the articles.

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Daragh Bradshaw

(Candidate)
Statement of Supervisors contribution to co-authored papers

As outlined in the candidate’s statement above, the substantial contribution to the co-authored papers presented in this thesis was made by the candidate. This includes the review of the literature, study design, statistical analysis, and interpretation of the data, together with the write-up for publication. The supervisors contributed to the papers by advising on statistical analysis and interpretational issues, relevant literature and writing style. The theoretical framing in this thesis and the arrangement of the papers is the product of concerted discussion between the candidate and his supervisors.

Professor Orla Muldoon ________________________________

Dr Ann-Marie Creaven ________________________________
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While a degree is awarded to a single person, it most definitely is a group endeavour. I want to acknowledge and thank some of those who have contributed much time, effort and support in getting me over the line.

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Personal Reflection

Conducting a PhD is a difficult journey to prepare for. There were the anticipated obstacles that needed to be negotiated such as developing my knowledge and skill in conducting a body of research. However, there were also the unanticipated issues such as the scale of difficulty involved in balancing family life and studies as well as my subsequent reaction to setbacks and difficulties encountered on the way.

Reflecting on where I am now compared to where I envisioned myself to be at the beginning of my PhD studies it would be easy to consider the whole endeavour an epic failure. I have under-produced in regards to my anticipated academic output and it has taken a lot longer to do this than I had previously envisioned. I have also not achieved in regards to developing my research skillset to my desired level. There appears to be far more that I don’t know or am unsure about than when I began the journey. Part of this resides in an overconfidence in my own abilities as well as an underestimation of the difficulty of the task I was about to engage in. Navigating an undergraduate degree where the constraints of a module are set by a lecturer, differs from my experiences in applied research which has no such parameters or guidelines. It involved a step up in quality and performance which it took me some time to negotiate and one that I am still navigating through. Additionally, my naivety surrounding the time and effort it takes in conducting research particularly in applied settings certainly contributed to an overestimation of what was possible.

Importantly though, while no research project can be completed without a number of setbacks, during my PhD I found that it is was not the setback itself that was the issue rather my response and reaction to it. I also found my focus began to shift. When I began my journey into psychology I viewed it as an extension of the community support
work I was already doing. My emphasis lay in the pursuit of knowledge and the application of that knowledge for the betterment of society. This approach served me well throughout my undergraduate years and into the beginning of my postgraduate journey. However as I progressed, I began to quantify and measure my output. My purpose began to move from the pursuit of knowledge towards the need to secure funding, progression, get published, and get a job.

Two years into my PhD my wife gave birth to a set of twin boys. Unsurprisingly, there were considerable demands on my time and attention. I found that the expectations and obligations I felt as a father conflicted with what I felt as a researcher. I began to feel inadequate in my performance as either. The more inadequate I felt as a researcher the more I disengaged from activities such as reading groups or conferences. I felt I was underperforming, and as my confidence dropped so too did my ability to feel secure in that role. I viewed my financial constraints and time restrictions as a result of my choice to engage in a PhD and this was having an impact on my now enlarged family. The difficulties surrounding being a PhD student such as financial issues, unreliable job prospects, as well as demands on time and attention were brought into sharp relief. I began to construct setbacks as catastrophic and unmanageable. I questioned my ability and authenticity as a researcher at every criticism, rather than focusing on the isolating the nature of the difficulty, I took on the criticism as an aspect of myself.

Approaching the final last few months I am left with a strange sense of ambivalence. On one hand, I retain a sense of failure in not achieving all that was possible given the space, time and support I have received from so many others. On the other hand, I also find there is a strange sense of pride. This thesis has contributed to how we understand stigma and identity and it has contributed in developing policy supporting a very vulnerable population. I am also completely aware of the privilege I have been
given in getting the opportunity, denied to many others, to conduct a PhD. While I have not fully reconciled these issues, I feel recognising them is a first step and one I can take with me into the next stage of life I am about to enter.
Chapter One

General introduction
Introduction

Worldwide trends in prison populations has altered the experience of incarceration from a marginal to an ordinary phenomenon (Pattillo, Weiman, & Western, 2004). A consequence of this rise is that families are increasingly being impacted, with between 45-87% of prisoners reported as parents (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Parental incarceration is shown to negatively impact families of those imprisoned (Dyer, Pleck, & McBride, 2012). However, maintaining meaningful contact between the incarcerated parent and their family is shown to reduce negative impact (Visher, Bakken & Gunter, 2013). Consequently, there has been a rise in interventions aimed at facilitating meaningful connection as well as supporting those involved (Armstrong et al., 2017).

Within this context, the Irish prison reform trust is currently implementing family friendly reform aimed at supporting families and reducing negative outcomes associated with PI. However, reforms that do not address the needs of those involved are destined to fail (Purvis, 2013). The impact of parental incarceration is shown to be very context specific, with different jurisdictions reporting conflicting findings (Besemer, Van der Geest, Murray, Bijleveld, & Farrington, 2011). However, very little research has been conducted in an Irish setting and so we know very little about the needs of the population or for that matter how they can be supported (Bradshaw & Muldoon, 2017). The purpose of this thesis is to address this gap and asks the following research questions:

1. Presuming father identity to be a useful vehicle for men to engage with their families, how do incarcerated men construct their identities as fathers?

2. What is the relationship between parental incarceration and children’s psychological, emotional and behavioural adjustment in an Irish context?
3. Can the benefits of group membership be accessed by partners of incarcerated fathers in the context of a stigmatised and resisted identity?

In this introductory chapter, I will begin by outlining an identity based approach and how our social identities can both considered both as a social cure and as a social curse.

In the next section, I will outline the structure of the thesis as well as describe the nature of the forthcoming chapters. I will then discuss difficulties I have encountered in conducting this research in such an applied setting. Finally, I will explore methodological and ethical considerations in conducting applied research with vulnerable populations such as families affected by parental incarceration.

**Background**

The end of the twentieth century witnessed an expansive growth in prison population (Wildeman, 2010). While the rate of imprisonment has seen a slight decrease since 2010 (the OECD, Society at a Glance 2016, p. 132), it estimated that over 11 million people are incarcerated worldwide (International Centre for Prison Studies, 2013). The unforeseen consequence of this is that families are becoming forgotten victims who serve second sentences alongside offenders (Mathews, 1983). This has been demonstrated to alter the life trajectories of not only the prisoner, but their partners and children also (Dyer et al., 2012).

Children of incarcerated parents are at increased risk of not only future incarceration but also exhibit negative educational, behavioural and emotional outcomes (Murray, Bijleveld, Farrington, & Loeber, 2014). Partners of imprisoned men are also shown to be at an increased risk of physical and mental health difficulties (Chui, 2016). Conversely, imprisoned fathers who maintain a positive relationship with their children are six times less likely to re-offend (Unit, 2002) while children whose families
participate in prison based parenting support schemes report improved self-concept (Harrison, 1997) and increased family integration (Bayse, Allgood & Van Wyk, 1991). Recognising the importance of such family connections for families affected by imprisonment, there is a growing number of initiatives aimed at supporting meaningful family relationships during incarceration (Loper & Turek, 2006).

However, research indicates a wide range of outcomes regarding the nature and severity of the impact of parental incarceration (PI) on families affected (Haskins, 2015). Conflicting findings can be a result of differences in methodological approaches (Johnson & Easterling, 2012) as well as differences in penal contexts (Besemer, et al., 2011). Little research has been conducted within an Irish context and so we have little understanding as to how families are impacted or for that matter how they can be best supported. Furthermore, while there are a growing number of supportive initiatives, many of these programs cater for the needs of incarcerated mothers (Purvis et al., 2013). As a result, there is a dearth in policy and research aimed at providing supports that cater to the specific needs of incarcerated fathers (Dyer, Pleck & McBride, 2012) or indeed for the wives and partners of these incarcerated men (Chui, 2016).

Within this context, identity theory is increasingly been recognised as central to understanding the association of PI and family outcomes (Finkley, 2017; Asencio & Burke, 2011). Labelling theory suggests that social expectations can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies (Murray, Bijleveld, Farrington, & Loeber, 2014). This can have real implications for incarcerated fathers and their families (Besemer, Farrington, Bijleveld, 2017). For example, once an individual acquires a particular identity label, such as delinquent, the individual can foster this self-image and amplify identity conforming anti-social behaviours (Farrington & Murrray, 2014; Besemer et al., 2017). This can strengthen social ties with deviant groups (Bernburg, Krohn, & Rivera, 2006).
Goffman (1963) described how discrimination and prejudice harms not only the individual with the stigmatised identity, but also extends to their family and associates. For example family members of people with stigmatised identities reported experiences of shame and culpability as well as strained and distant relationships with others (Östman & Kjellin, 2002; Corrigan & Miller, 2004). Codd (2013) describes how incarceration can be understood as a ‘courtesy stigma’ (Goffman, 1963), where the family share the spoiled identity of the inmate. Corrigan, Watson and Barr (2006) found that families of those with an anti-social behaviour identity, such as drug addiction, faced an increased risk of being blamed and socially shunned.

Compounding this, there is converging evidence to suggest that once a family is characterised as a ‘criminal family’, they receive more attention and differential treatment from others (Theobald & Farrington, 2014). For example, families of known offenders are more likely to be processed through the courts after an offense (Besemer, Ahmad, Hinshaw & Farrington, 2017), as well as face reduced access to jobs, housing and education (Bernburg, Krohn, Rivera, 2006; Hagan, 2012). Dallaire, Ciccone and Wilson (2010) found that teachers expected reduced academic ability in children affected by PI rather than in children from single parent families not affected by PI. Moreover, this situation is aggravated when the treatment is perceived to be unfair by those affected. This can lead to anger and defiance and can increase anti-social behaviour and mental health difficulties (Giordano, 2010). However, labelling theory has been criticised, as it does not account for different behavioural outcomes in response to a common identity label (Sampson & Laub, 1993). Nor does it contain a central theoretical perspective through which individual agency can be explained (Asencio & Burke, 2011)

In response to these criticisms, Asencio and Burke (2011) recommend adopting a broader perspective on identity theory. From this perspective, it is worth remembering
that we are social beings (Wakefield et al., 2019). We are born into families, we live in communities, and we work and play in groups and it is these groups that we belong to that become part of our self-identity, our social identity. A sense of self that is derived from our meaningful connection with others (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). We have many different social identities, such as family or community, and depending on the features of any given context, different social identities become relevant for us (Turner, Hogg, Oakes Reicher & Wetherell, 1987).

This approach to identity draws on the work of Tajfel and colleagues (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). In a series of experiments where individuals were randomly assigned to meaningless groups, these researchers developed an understanding whereby group identification was central to social behaviour. Turner and colleagues (1987) refined and extended this approach through self-categorisation theory (SCT). SCT asserts that we can define ourselves at multiples levels, with each level having an implication for our behaviour. At the subordinate level we see ourselves as individuals and a personal identity; at an intermediate level we see ourselves in terms of our membership of specific groups; and at a superordinate level we define ourselves as human.

The importance of this contribution is that SCT provided the theoretical framework through which we can understand how and when we define ourselves in terms of our social identities (Haslam, Jetten, Cruwys, Dingle & Haslam, 2018). Turner argued that group behaviour arose from a process called depersonalisation, where one’s identity moves from a sense of individual (“I”) to a sense of a member of a group (“we”). At the core of this move is the process of self-stereotyping where the self is understood in terms of in-group membership. Once an individual identifies themselves within a particular
group, they will enact the norms and values of that group (Haslam et al., 2018). Depending on the context, a different identity will be salient and so become influential.

The salience of a given identity relies on the accessibility of the identity as well as two factors—normative and comparative fit (Oakes, 1987). Comparative fit refers to whether the differences within the in-group are smaller than the difference between the in- and out-group (Haslam, et al., 2018). Conversely, normative fit is when the behaviours of the members of a group are congruent with the perceiver’s stereotypical expectations (Van Rijswijk Haslam & Ellemers, 2006).

Rather than static or essentialist, our social identities are thought to be constructed and negotiated through our social interactions (Wiggins, 2014). However, what is considered normative for any given identity differs across time and contexts (Major & O’Brien, 2005). Consequently, identity constructions are more than mere descriptions of the world around us, rather they organise the social world and can be seen to have strategic social and political functions (Stevenson & Muldoon, 2010). For example, Augoustinos, Tuffin, and Rapley (1999), explored Australian students’ views on the disadvantages faced by Aboriginal peoples. Issues of discrimination were framed as being consequences of individual choice, such as public drunkenness. In doing so, participants avoided historical and social factors and constructed the Aboriginal people as active agents in creating negative stereotypes (Demasi, 2016).

Identification with our relevant groups facilitates the development of social influence attitudes and behaviours associated with the group (Oyserman, Friberg & Yoder, 2007). For example, nurses willingness to receive a flu vaccination was partially mediated by a professional identity constructed around patient responsibility (Falomir-Pichastor, Toscani, Despointes, 2009). This research illustrates how behaviour of the
health professionals was dependent on the perceived norms of their professional group (Jetten, Haslam, & Haslam, 2009).

Equally, normative expectations can regulate group membership (Van Rijswijk, Haslam & Ellemers, 2006). Those who are seen not to adhere to expected group attitudes and behaviours can be excluded from the group. In the context of contested identity, individuals can engage in actively claiming that identity thorough overt normative behaviours (Stevenson & Muldoon, 2010). Conversely, over claiming can result in compromising any claim in drawing attention to the contested nature of their membership (Joyce, Stevenson & Muldoon, 2013)

Our social identities are recognised to be a psychological resource (Jetten, et al., 2009). Membership of our relevant groups provides a sense of meaning, agency and self-worth as well as enables social connection and support (Haslam, Jetten, Postmes & Haslam, 2009). Levine, Prosser, Evans, and Reicher (2005) demonstrate, when individuals in need of assistance were identified as a fellow group member they were more willing to offer support, while Haslam and colleagues, argue that support received from in group members was received and understood as more supportive than when offered by an outgroup member (2012). Additionally, Kellezi, Reicher, and Cassidy (2009) demonstrated that when adverse wartime experiences were understood to be identity-affirming, individuals were more able to access social support and reduce the negative psychological impact of the events. In this way, our social groups are understood to be positive to our overall health and well-being (Haslam, et al., 2018).

Harnessing the beneficial aspects of our identities is conceptualised as a ‘social cure’ (Haslam, et al., 2009). By subjectively identifying with a group we gain access to group resources thereby enhancing well-being (Cruwys & Gunaseelan, 2016). Recent
research illustrates how group based interventions can harness our social identities in order to enhance positive mental health (Williams, Dingle, Jetten, & Rowan, 2019). Additionally, being a member of multiple groups can confer additional benefits (Walter, Jetten, Dingle & Johnstone, 2015), as these identities will give access to more beneficial resources (Iyer et al., 2009). Moreover, social identities can also act as gateway identities, whereby one identity lends to the acquisition of other social identities with additional health related benefits (Kearns, Msetfi, & Muldoon, 2016).

However, some group memberships can actively undermine our well-being (Sani et al., 2012). As such our social identities can also be conceptualised as a ‘social curse’ (Kellezi & Reicher, 2012). For example, stigma is a destructive attribute that that bestows upon an individual a tainted and devalued identity on the basis of their group membership (Goffman, 1963). Members of a stigmatised identity are at risk of reduced access to valued resources such as education (Crandall, 1995) or employment (Nelson, 2002). Membership of a stigmatised group can also leave individuals vulnerable to a pervasive sense of negative social judgment thereby undermining their self-esteem (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Consequently, the impact of a stigmatised identity is linked with negative mental and physical, outcomes (Major & O’Brien, 2005).

In coping with a stigmatised identity, group members can engage in either group or individual based coping strategies. Group based coping strategies can involve identifying more with the stigmatised group. In doing so, group membership can trigger protective features of the social cure and buffer against the more negative outcomes of the discrimination (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999). In contrast, individuals can also move away from the group and attempt to protect themselves by avoiding the stigmatising identity all together. This is particularly evident in the context were the stigmatised identity is concealable or perceived to be temporary (Quinn & Earnshaw,
2015). However, in moving away from the group identity individuals are also undermining their own access to social support.

Children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of a stigmatised identity as it shapes their perception and engagement with the broader world (Schmitt, Branscombe, Postmes, & Garcia, 2014). Additionally, children may not have the identity resources or understanding necessary to confront negative appraisals of self (Phinney & Baldelomar, 2011). Recognising the negative impact of stigma on children, family members can actively try to shield the children from exposure to the stigmatised nature of a family based identity by not speaking with them about the nature of the stigmatised identity or by instructing them not to speak about a potentially stigmatised aspect of their identity with others (Joachim & Acorn, 2000). However, previous research indicates that children’s concept of stigma emerges in middle childhood with 92% of children under 10 being familiar with the term discrimination (Verkuyten, Kinket, & Van der Wielen, 1997). Awareness of their parents’ reluctance to engage in the discussion surrounding a problematic identity can deter children from seeking support from either the community or family resources.

**Current research**

While stigma represents a very real concern for families affected by parental incarceration, there remains very little research conducted in the area (Phillips & Gates, 2011). Codd (2013) describes how incarceration can be understood as a ‘courtesy stigma’ (Goffman, 1963), where the family share the spoiled identity of the inmate. While there are no official figures relating to the number of inmates who are parents, a recent survey of visits received by prisoners estimated that between 6,865 and 8,283 children are affected by PI in Ireland on any given day (IPRT, 2017). This may account for between
0.7% - 0.8% of the total child population in Ireland (Dunne et al., 2007). The lack of official figures emphasises how understudied this topic is. Consequently, little is known about the implications for families affected by incarceration in an Irish context. The purpose of this thesis is to address this gap by exploring the experiences of families affected by parental incarceration in a changing Irish prison system. The main body of this thesis is in the form of three stand-alone papers presented in chapters’ two to four inclusive, each chapter focuses on a different member of the family.

Chapter 2, the first empirical chapter, examines the construction of fatherhood in incarcerated men with children. In actively claiming their father identity, incarcerated fathers may emphasise their underperformance in the role and as a result incur negative social appraisals. So potentially, enactment of identity can be seen as problematic for incarcerated men, and as such we use this context to examine how these men maintain a father identity in the absence of enactment opportunities. We know also that contexts can influence self-categorisation by regulating enactment and legitimising some identity constructs over others. Individuals who do not adhere to the ‘in-group norms’ can find their membership of the group contested or delegitimised. Identification also occurs through a process of comparison reliant on the accessibility and fit. Therefore, in a sample of incarcerated men we explore the possibility of whether fathers’ identities are contested and how they can engage in active claiming of fatherhood in this constrained context.

Chapter 3, the second empirical paper, explores the relationship between parental incarceration and children’s emotional, behavioural and psychological outcomes. Early childhood represents a critical period in a child’s emotional, behavioural and social development and can be negatively impacted by parental incarceration (Haskins, 2015). In reviewing the wider literature stigmatisation emerges as a crucial concern for children
of those incarcerated (Phillips et al., 2006) and can be seen as a key unintended and adverse consequence of parental incarceration (PI). The negative impact of stigma and perceived discrimination arising from stigmatised identities can be buffered for children through family and community supports (Bradshaw et al., 2016). However, in the context of PI children can feel socially isolated and cut off from these supports (Bradshaw and Muldoon, 2017). Previous research found that for boys, exposure to PI in the first 10 years of their life doubles their risk of future behavioural and internalising difficulties (Murray & Farrington, 2008). This puts children at increased risk of future offending (Besemer & Farrington, 2012). However, the authors concluded that it was the conviction itself rather than the conviction trajectory of the father that was associated with offspring convictions. Furthermore, Miller (2006) found that children exposed to PI can suffer long term psychological effects such as depression, anxiety and emotional difficulties. Conversely, a number of other studies have found no association between PI and mental health or behavioural problems (Kinner, Alati, Najman & Williams, 2007; Murray, Janson, & Farrington, 2007) again emphasising the need for further research in this area. Consequently this chapter explores the relationship between PI on children’s’ psychological and behavioural adjustment.

Chapter 4, the third and final empirical paper, explores the experiences of partners of incarcerated fathers. In an effort to combat the social isolation and stigma associated with the incarceration of a family member increasingly efforts are made to support families affected by imprisonment. Many of these supports are delivered in group formats. Participation in support groups accrue benefits, sometimes referred to as the social cure, by enhancing a sense of belonging, social connection and subjective identification with the group. Where an identity is stigmatised, subjective group identification may be resisted with the knock on potential to undermine the effectiveness of group-based
support. We used semi-structured interviews with 12 partners of incarcerated men participating in a group-based support, to explore their identity constructions as well as their perceptions of the value of the support group.

**Challenges of research with families affected by parental incarceration**

The current research coincided with an evaluation of a pilot prison based family support initiative called Family Links (Bradshaw & Muldoon, 2017). Family Links was an initiative run by The Irish Prison Service in collaboration with a number of community partners, Bedford Row Family Project, Tallaght Childhood Initiative and the Irish Penal Reform Trust. This initiative aimed at supporting meaningful family connection for prisoners and their families during paternal imprisonment. My own role within the project was to conduct a process evaluation of the implementation of the initiative. This has been completed and submitted for consideration to the NGO with which we were working separately (Bradshaw & Muldoon, 2017). While there are benefits of conducting research in applied settings such as the criminal justice system, the applied nature of the research affected the development of the current project. During this process it was evident that trust and logistics were very real issues with implications for the course of the research. This was most evident in areas such as recruiting/retaining participants, research design, and subsequent choice of analysis.

For me, the opportunity to be involved in the evaluation process with the prison service was a very exciting one. I am interested in the area of identity and specifically the impact of stigma and discrimination. I had previously worked both as a community worker and researcher in deprived and stigmatised communities. As a researcher, I have already used a cross-sectional study to explore the impact of perceived discrimination on children developing in marginalised communities (Bradshaw & Muldoon, 2016). As a community
worker, I worked in establishing community workshops and applied projects targeting deprived and marginalised communities. Workshops were often conducted in very challenging contexts and involved working with marginalised & emigrant communities, as well as survivors of abuse. These programs aimed at developing individual self-esteem, as well as increasing community spirit & integration. The current study represented an opportunity to work on a project that was truly applied in nature, and reflecting my own ambitions, had the potential to affect people’s lives positively.

The benefits of conducting research in applied settings are immediately evident in the areas of recruitment as well as in the potential impact of the research. In the current project, I had access to a relevant cohort of participants. Recruiting families who have been affected by incarceration can be very difficult (Abrams, 2010), accessible only through influential gatekeepers. Without the support of the Irish Prison Service and community partners, I am not convinced I would have been able to achieve the numbers that I did. Even if I had managed to recruit sufficient numbers, I may not have been able to explore how they interacted in group settings.

An additional benefit was that the impact of the work has been immediately apparent outside of an academic or theoretical context. Navigating a paper through the publication process can be a time consuming endeavour. Even when successful, it is difficult for a researcher to gauge if the work has any impact on policy or future initiatives. Conversely, the applied nature of the current research ensured that findings were presented to key stakeholders (Bradshaw & Muldoon, November 2015), and recommendations were delivered directly to the Department of Justice and currently contribute to national policy in this area (Bradshaw & Muldoon, February 2017).
However, conducting research in applied settings can also be very challenging. Unlike controlled laboratory settings, applied research is unpredictable (Johnson & Easterling, 2012; Abrams, 2010), and in that sense the current research was no different. The exploratory nature of the Family Links pilot scheme, allowed for elements of the programme to be adapted during the implementation schedule. Consequently, rather than following the carefully scheduled and planned research proposal, I found that my research was constantly pulled and pushed in directions outside of my control. This resulted in aspect of the proposal having to be altered or removed altogether. For example, in the original research proposal families were to participate in pre and post initiative family friendly visits. However, difficulties in scheduling of the visits due to prison regulatory concerns, ensured that visits were rarely if ever scheduled in such a manner with some families receiving only one visit. Consequently, data was not robust enough to conduct pre and post initiative comparisons and so was removed from the analysis.

Similarly, recruitment of the participants was subject to contextual demands. As with many hard to reach populations (Abrams, 2010), access to participants was negotiated though gatekeepers such as the local prison, and community partners. Consequently, recruitment were filtered through the rules and regulations of institutional bodies and agencies rather than specific criteria of the research design. For example, in the initial inclusion criteria, potential applicants needed to satisfy three conditions in order to partake in the initiative; (1) Have a child between the ages of 6-18 years of age whom they had regular contact; (2) Their partner is willing and able to engage with the community partner on a weekly basis, & (3) Satisfy child protection issues. However as the initiative moved onto the prison site, prison regulations further restricted access to those who adhered to an internal prison disciplinary process.
Consequently, these measures precluded many incarcerated fathers who did not gain access to the programme as they were in violation of prison regulations rather than they were excluded on the basis of a research inclusion criteria. This meant that only prisoners on what was called an ‘Enhanced Status’ was available for recruitment. One of the consequences of this was that a proposed control group of fathers not participating on the initiative were now unavailable to the research team and the pool of fathers eligible to participate on the initiative was greatly reduced. Similarly, only partners of incarcerated men who were participating in the programme were made available to the research team. Care-givers of children impacted by paternal incarceration whose fathers were not participating were not available for inclusion on to the research arm of the project.

Additionally, individuals were removed from the initiative, and in one case moved to a different prison complex, due to prison-related disciplinary issues rather than related to behaviour on the initiative itself. In such cases it involved a concerted, and at times unsuccessful, effort to persuade both the incarcerated father and their family to remain involved in the research project despite the fact they have been removed from the parenting initiative.

Maintaining both a prison identity and a father identity can be problematic for incarcerated fathers (Dyer, 2005). Their lack of access to these important and meaningful identities can be very damaging to their sense of self, given that they live in a context where traditional constructions of masculinity are challenged through subordination, restriction and deprivation. In response, men often engage in combative behaviours seeking to regain both social power and a positive sense of their own masculinity (Phillips, 2001). In the process, men can erode their social bonds with those outside of the prison context as well as with those within. This can present a difficulty for researchers
who are interested in recruiting prisoners willing to speak about their own constructions of fatherhood.

Compounding the logistic difficulties, were issues relating to the interagency collaborations. The initiative involved many agencies interacting who had different ethos and ways of working. Decisions surrounding the acceptance or removal of potential participants were negotiated in the context of diametrically opposed ethos of care and control. This resulted in difficulties surrounding collaboration impacting discussions surrounding the suitability or removal of the participating families. Equally, arrangements to meet with participants or indeed the sites where interviews were conducted were dictated by the competing needs of different departments and agencies involved in the initiative.

My presence as a researcher as part of evaluation team represented a further complication to this process, as evaluation of the initiative was at times misconstrued as an evaluation of aspects of the individual agencies and so was met with a level of mistrust. One of the consequences of this was negotiating access to the participants particularly those in the community setting, was at times very strained. Initial requests to invite participants on to the research project were met with guarded reactions by gatekeepers involved. The relevance and ability of the research team was questioned and used as a basis to refuse initial recruitment requests. Eventually, only families of incarcerated men who were participating in the programme were made available for recruitment. Families of children impacted by paternal incarceration whose fathers were not participating were not available for inclusion on to the research arm of the project. Additionally, agencies attempted to prepare the ground with participants and explain the purpose of the research as well as attempted to debrief the participants regarding the research process without the research team being present. In order to maintain the independence and integrity of the
research process, significant efforts were taken on the part of the research team by reassuring agencies involved both of the focus and importance of conducting the present research.

Finally, having gained access to speak with families and invite them to participate onto the research element of the initiative, trust again emerged as a concern. One parent articulated that his partner and other families were reluctant to engage in outside agencies as they were concerned that their parenting abilities or eligibility for receipt of social welfare payments were being evaluated. Additionally, researchers were construed as being middle class and the potential for negative social appraisals was an issue for those concerned. This again involved effort on the part of the researchers to reassure families of the intentions and scope research as well as the potential impact of the proposed research.

The restrictions and difficulties outlined above perhaps had greatest impact on our ability to recruit sufficient number of eligible children into the research project. As greater emphasis was placed on the ‘enhanced status’ of the incarcerated father rather than on other eligibility concerns, there were fewer fathers eligible with children aged 6-12. This resulted in families participating with children as young as 4 months which were unsuitable for our own research purposes. Consequently the current project used data from a longitudinal cohort study in order to assess the relationship between PI on children affected. This in itself presented difficulties and challenges relating to what the variables included in the dataset and draws our attention to the invisible nature of children’s experiences of parental incarceration. To date there is no national database or centre of information collating the amount children impacted and no resources available to track how children who are affected develop into adulthood.
Ethical Considerations

Academic research in the context of parental incarceration brings with it a number of ethical considerations. Primarily, the focus of the research is on multiple populations, such as prisoners, prisoner families and prison officers, each with their own unique vulnerability. Additionally, conducting qualitative research also come with issues of researcher physical safety and mental health wellbeing.

Families in the context of PI represent a particularly vulnerable cohort and can experience feelings of mistrust to external agencies. While there is an implicit power imbalance between the researcher and participant (Swauger 2011), this may be exacerbated within the context of PI by prior experiences with authoritative figures (such child welfare, prison, police or court services). Prisoners or prisoner families may also feel obliged to participate with research efforts if it is understood that the research is being conducted on behalf of the prison authorities. This would be particularly salient if they felt that participation on any research efforts was linked with future prison based incentives such as visiting privileges, temporary release schemes or support initiatives. Equally, officers and other stakeholders can also experience feelings of mistrust toward both external agencies and internal management. This may result in a reluctance to engage in the research process. However, due to the hierarchical nature of the prison system, prison officers can feel obliged to participate, as any research conducted on the prison environment has the implicit support of superior officers and the prison service itself.

There is also the potential risk for families of imprisoned fathers to experience minor levels of trauma due to the nature of the study. Questions relating to their parenting techniques or experiences of the incarceration of a close family member can revisit a troubling aspect of their lives. The interview process itself may be reminiscent to
previous difficult interview experiences involving the judicial or child welfare systems. Imprisoned fathers and their partners may also negatively evaluate their performance in the role of parent or feel judged in this respect. This can result in reductions in self-esteem (Skar, Von Tetzchner, Clucas, & Sherr 2014).

Conversely, while there is a concern regarding the protection of vulnerable populations, researchers need to be cognisant of the potential harm of over-protection which can contribute to the “invisibility and silence” of difficult to reach populations (Arditti, 2015). So while we need to ensure participants do not feel coerced into participation or are traumatised by the experience, we also need to ensure they have a voice and can contribute to existing research and future policy (Morrow & Richards, 1996; Medical Council Research, 1991). Barriers aimed at protecting can in certain cases inhibit participation and create situations where research or the quality of the research is so compromised as to undermine future research in the area (Arditti, 2015).

Consequently, within this context it is important to maintain and emphasise the independence and integrity of the research. Families need to be assured that confidentiality will be maintained as well as provided with information for psychological and social support should they become affected by any aspect arising from the interviews. It should be made clear that participation on the study is not required of prisoners or families, nor will it result in any additional tangible advantages in living conditions or preferential treatment (such as in parole hearings) or negatively impact daily duties or career path. The researcher needs to emphasise the concept of informed consent, particularly the participants’ right to withdraw at any point without repercussions. Finally, researchers need to adopt a compassionate, sensitive and non-judgemental approach to the interviews with all concerned.
When conducting qualitative research it is also important to be mindful of issues surrounding researcher safety. This is particularly relevant in the context of potentially dangerous or traumatic contexts (Quina et al., 2008). Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen and Liamputtong (2007) emphasise how researchers face a number of challenges including rapport development, self-disclosure, and researcher exhaustion. Recognising these potential difficulties, the present study developed a research protocol to ensure researcher safety: researchers were to go in pairs to all external interview sites; when conducting interviews in the prison-setting prison protocols and rules were to be followed at all times; Researchers met and debriefed together after each interview; Opportunities to access confidential support agencies were made available throughout the interview process; Children-First training was provided to researchers in order to equip and inform researchers of the relevant protocol in the event of participant disclosure or child protection issues.

**Methodology**

In developing any programme of research, it is important that the researcher establish their ontological and epistemological position. Ontology refers to the nature of knowledge or reality (Dieronitou, 2014), while epistemology refers to how the researcher goes about acquiring that knowledge and the underlining assumptions about how knowledge is acquired and has meaning. Traditionally, ontological choices were understood as distinct and potentially opposing paradigms such as positivism or interpretivism. Conversely, recent research emphasises that in order to create a more complete picture of multifaceted social phenomena, there is a need to adopt more hybrid approaches (Dieronitou, 2014: Denscombe, 2008). Furthermore, Weisburd, Farrington, and Gill (2017) maintain that, in order to inform policy and practice through criminology research, there is a need to use a more integrated approach. However, this approach
emphasises a number of issues particularly surrounding concepts such as the rigour of the research and the status of the findings.

Research into the association of PI and negative outcomes for families, indicates a wide range and heterogeneity of findings. The breath and nuance of these findings emphasise the utility and importance of using an equally broad range of methodological approaches (Haskins, Amorim, & Mingo, 2017; Weisburd et al., 2017). By drawing on the strengths of each approach, we can build a greater understanding of social phenomen. However, it is important that the researcher is mindful of the underlining assumptions of each approach.

For example, quantitative approaches assume that there are immutable sets of laws governing the social and natural world. By understanding these laws, we can begin to describe the relationships between observable phenomena. Within this paradigm, reality exists independent of the social actors involved. This approach offers the opportunity to generalise results, explore heterogeneous responses and quantify outcomes. Quantitative approaches are capable of identifying associations between PI and negative outcomes for families and control for confounding variables.

This is particularly relevant for PI, as those affected are not evenly distributed across society. Families impacted are also likely to be experiencing other forms of disadvantage such as poverty and negative life experiences (Travis, Redburn, & Western, 2014). By using sophisticated matching techniques as well as longitudinal datasets, researchers can combat the pervasive selection bias evident in incarceration scholarship and identify the unique contribution of incarceration (Haskins et al., 2017).

In contrast, adopting a qualitative approach, researchers can capture how people understand and perceive the world around them (Willig, 2013). This can provide insight
into the processes involved in complex social situations (Curry, Nembhard & Bradley, 2009) such as the prison environment. Such approaches can also allow for a purposeful sampling, develop theory and provide in-depth understandings of how PI is experienced by families affected (Arditti, 2012, Patton, 2002). Qualitative research also allows for the discovery of unanticipated mechanisms and outcomes (for examples see Giordano, 2010; Siegel, 2011; Turanovic et al., 2012).

In adopting a qualitative approach, researchers are making a number of assumptions about the nature of reality. Social phenomena from this perspective are considered to be constructed by the meanings and perspectives of the social actors involved. As such, our perceived reality is constantly revised though our social interactions. Consequently, causal findings are problematic as meaning is constantly in flux.

Unlike quantitative approaches, the researcher is to the fore of the research process. As such, researcher perspectives are integral to both the creation and interpretation of the results. While in the quantitative studies this is reflected in the design of the study, selection of materials, recruitment and decisions surrounding analysis, in qualitative studies. In a qualitative approach, findings are explicitly filtered through the subjectivity of the researcher. With this in mind, I reflect on my own role in the process particularly surrounding how my presence will have influenced participant’s responses as well as how my own subjectivity will have implications for any analysis conducted. However, rather than a threat to knowledge production (Boyatzis, 1998), this subjectivity is conceptualised as a resource and an essential element in interpretation and creation of new knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Mixed method approaches, often referred to as the ‘third Paradigm’ (Denscombe, 2008), offer the potential to interpret the breadth and depth of experiences associated with PI
(Haskins et al., 2017). By employing both in-depth interview data as well as statistical analysis a more complete and comprehensive understanding is possible than by using either qualitative or quantitative approaches alone (Bergman, 2008; Forman et al., 2013; Small, 2011).

However, while Weisburd and colleagues (2017) have called for more qualitative and mixed approaches in order to inform policy and practice, there is an ongoing debate surrounding the status and rigour of the qualitative findings (Yardley, 2017).

Traditionally, rigour is demonstrated through reliability, validity, and generalisation. Often this is demonstrated through test-retest correlations or interrater reliability (Potter, 1996). However, such criteria have been developed in accordance more quantitative approaches, and so, are problematic for those working with qualitative data (Tobin & Begley, 2004; Potter, 1996).

Addressing these concerns, there have been numerous attempts at an overarching criteria to evaluate qualitative research (Tobin & Begley, 2004; Willig, 2013). Leung (2017) maintains that there are two leading schools of thought: One based on methodology (Dixon-Woods, Shaw, Argarwal, & Smith, 2004); and the other based on the rigour of interpretation of results (Lincoln, Lyham & Guba, 2011). However, neither approach is without its critics.

Barbour (2001) draws attention to the inadequacy of a methodological based assessment, as it does not account for studies that differ in epistemological approach. This can pose a problem as Reicher (2000) and Madhill and Doherty (2000) argue that epistemological diversity characterises qualitative research (Willig, 2013). Equally, critics of results based assessment argue that without a focus on the methodology, rigorous interpretation of the results will not confer additional validity.
In response to these concerns, Meyrick (2006) argues that good quality qualitative research can be validated through ‘transparency’ and ‘systematicity’ applied to the entire research process. Willig (2013) proposes that in order to conduct a meaningful assessment, researchers need to outline their epistemological position, the kind of knowledge the research sought to produce, and the contribution the researcher sought to make. Through this open and grounded approach, Sandelowski (2004) argues that qualitative research can offer knowledge that is valid and generalisable for a wider understanding of social phenomena.

The current thesis approaches rigour by drawing on the concepts of systematicity, transparency, clarity, and appropriateness (Nixon & Power, 2006). Answering the call for a more hybrid approach (Haskins 2015; Weisburd et al., 2017), I adopted different methods for different studies in order to answer the specific research questions. Each chapter within this thesis is a discrete entity either accepted or under review in ISI journals. As such, each contains its own justification for the methodology of choice. Throughout, I have been explicit and consistent in my epistemological position. I have been transparent and systematic in my approach to the data using established concepts, strategies and criteria to guide the analysis. In this way, I endeavoured to make an impactful and authentic contribution to our understanding of paternal incarceration for families concerned.

**Conclusion**

This thesis explores the experiences of families affected by parental incarceration in a changing Irish prison system. Taking a psychological perspective and adopting a social identity approach, the current research asks the overarching question, ‘What is the effect on families of experiencing a stigmatising event such as paternal incarceration?’ In doing
so, this thesis aims to provide an insight into the experiences of families impacted by stigma. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the cumulative impact this project has had on theoretical and practical implications of the project as well as highlighting limitations and avenues of future
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Chapter Two

The construction and enactment of identity among incarcerated fathers

A version of this manuscript is currently under review at European Journal of Social Psychology
Abstract

This study examined the construction of fatherhood amongst incarcerated men with children. Individuals who do not adhere to ‘in-group norms’ can find their membership contested. For this reason father identity can be seen as problematic for incarcerated men so we use this context to examine if and how these men maintain a father identity. Using semi-structured interviews, the current study explores identity construction with 15 incarcerated fathers. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using a discursive psychology approach.

Findings identified how participants strategically used their different identities of prisoner and father in order to construct a positive version of themselves as fathers. Three themes of: 1. Uncontested fatherhood; 2. Constrained fatherhood; and 3. Reinterpreting offending behaviour as learning and growth for fatherhood, are identified in the data. These themes demonstrate how participants emphasised the ambiguous and subjective nature of identity in order to create positive constructions of father identity. Fathers drew on their unique understanding of criminal behaviour to emphasise their potential positive contribution as a parent. Findings are discussed in terms of their theoretical and practical implications.

Keywords: discursive psychology; contested identity; incarcerated father; self-categorisation; social identity; stigma;
Introduction

Rather than static and essentialist, identity is increasingly understood to be socially constructed, created through our interactions with others (Wiggins, 2014). Consequently, social contexts and interactions can legitimise or restrict our access to valued identities (Durrheim & Dixon, 2005). Equally, individuals who do not adhere to the established norms and practices of the group can find their claims to group membership undermined (Van Rijswijk, Haslam & Ellemers, 2006). As such, for incarcerated men, maintaining a positive father identity may be problematic. Social constructions of what it means to be a father, as well as restricted ability to engage as a father, can undermine incarcerated men’s sense of themselves as fathers and with it their ability to engage in meaningful relationships with family members on the outside.

Understanding how incarcerated fathers access the identity of father remains an important goal (Dyer, 2005). In light of the obstacles to achieve a positive father identity for incarcerated fathers, it is likely this construction is not straight forward. Therefore, our key question is how do incarcerated men construct their identities as fathers?

Maintaining positive family connection during incarceration is seen to be an important tool in tackling future and intergenerational offending, and improving current inmate behaviour is a first order priority of many rehabilitation initiatives (Unit, 2002; Harrison, 1997; Bayse, Allgood & Van Wyk, 1991). Consequently, recent years has seen a rise in prison based programmes aimed at emphasising father identity. This policy aims at reducing institutionalised identities (Dyer, Pleck & McBride, 2012) and encourages greater family involvement (Purvis, 2013). Recognising the importance of such family connections for families affected by imprisonment, there are a growing number of initiatives aimed at supporting meaningful family relationships during incarceration (Loper & Turek, 2006). However, in the context of contested and stigmatised identity,
such as ‘incarcerated father’, there may be barriers, and so it is important to understand how fathers maintain and manage this identity in this context.

These identity constructions are thought to be strategic in nature in that they organise the world in order to achieve ideological functions (Verkuyten, 1997; Varjonen Arnold & Jasinskaaja-Lahti, 2013). For example, Tileagă (2006) demonstrated how native Romanians discursively constructed the minority and marginalised Romanie identity as being essentialist, unadaptable and outside of the natural order of things in order to normalise and justify continued practices of exclusion and discrimination of Romanies. In contrast, fatherhood is increasingly being constructed as within the natural order of things where genetic fatherhood is used as justification for continued engagement with the family (Gregory & Milner, 2011; Collier and Sheldon, 2008). Similarly, Reicher and Hopkins (2001) demonstrate how national identity was actively constructed through discourse but also strategically deployed. Specifically, different constructions of the same national identity are created by different speakers in order to support and progress different political agendas.

While we have many different social identities, how we categorise as group members is achieved through a dynamic and context dependent comparative process of self-categorisation (Turner et al., 1987). This process relies on the accessibility of the identity as well as two factors- normative and comparative fit (Oakes, 1987). Comparative fit refers to whether the differences within the in-group are smaller than the difference between the in- and out-group (Haslam, et al., 2018). Conversely, normative fit is when the behaviours of the members of a group are congruent with the perceiver’s stereotypical expectations (Rijswijk et al., 2006). Drawing on the principles of social identity and self-categorisation, Hogg (2011) describes how inter-group comparison is conducted in order to construct a distinctive and positive identity. As such, these comparisons are normally
conducted downwards on an aspect of value for the in-group on which they compare favourably with the out-group. Conversely, intra-group comparisons aim at assimilating one’s self into the in-group prototype. Such comparisons are normally conducted upward in order to enhance prototypicality (Hogg, 2011). However, Jahoda and Markova (2004) demonstrated that people with intellectual disabilities conducted downward comparisons with intellectually disabled peers in order to protect a positive sense of self (O’Byrne & Muldoon, 2017) (See page 18-24, for overview of SIT and SCT).

Durrheim and Dixon (2005) argue that the site of an interaction is as important as the interaction itself. Places are not empty vessels containing social interaction, but rather are meaningful sites of enactment and construction in and of themselves. As such, context can influence not only which identity is salient but can serve to regulate enactment opportunities legitimising specific social practices and relations (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000). For example domestic labour in South Africa is marked by the intersection of race, gender and class inequalities. Despite the advances made during the post-apartheid era in desegregation and protecting workers rights, domestic workers continue to enact and occupy separate spaces, or use separate inferior cutlery and dishes (Jacobs, Manicom & Durrheim, 2014). In this way, spaces facilitated the continued and daily enactment of a relationship between employer and employee which was marked in a stark disparity of racial power and status (Durrheim et al., 2014). The idea that questions of ‘who we are’ can be intimately linked to ‘where we are’ (Durrheim & Dixon, 2005) is particularly relevant for incarcerated fathers. These contextual factors and associated limitations of identity enactment for men in prison, means that claims to a father identity may be contested.

Contested identities appear to necessitate particular forms of identity management (Stevenson & Muldoon, 2010). In an uncontested situation, identity is assumed and
presented as self-evident. This contrasts with situations where identity was disputed. In this context individuals proactively claim the identity with overt identity affirming behaviours and beliefs. Due to the enforced absence from parenting duties, overt displays of identity affirming behaviour can be difficult to achieve for incarcerated men. Individuals who actively claim identity are faced with an additional difficulty. In actively claiming rather than assuming group membership, individuals may inadvertently undermine the claim itself (Joyce, Stevenson & Muldoon, 2013) and so incarcerated fathers may need to be cautious about active claims to a father identity.

The present study then examines how men who are imprisoned produce their claims to fatherhood in their talk. Taking as a starting point a concern that this identity may be contested because of their incarceration we are interested in how men make their identity claims. Second we are interested, given the relatively unusual and under explored context, how men may manage the negativity others may have about their identity performance as parents and fathers. Given the likelihood that both their partners and others in their wider social networks are likely to appraise incarceration as a failing for these fathers, a second interest is in how men manage and negotiate fatherhood in prison. We are particularly interested in how any positive sense of father identity can be constructed and maintained given the potential negative impact of intragroup comparisons for prison fathers and the value of this identity for later reintegration into family life.

Method

Participants and Procedure

This study recruited 15 fathers incarcerated in [NAME] prison who were participating in a prison-based parenting support group. All of the men participating on a prison based parenting support group agreed to participate with the research. Sentences
ranged from awaiting sentencing to life imprisonment. Fathers ranged in age from 20-45 (M= 29.73, SD= 7.88), and had an average of 1.87 (SD=0.92) children, 12 girls (43%) and 16 boys (57%). Prior to incarceration 14 (93%) of fathers were unemployed (See Table 1).

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father age</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29.73 (7.88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children &lt;18 years</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1.87 (.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of Children &lt;18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.46 (3.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.46 (3.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4.46 (3.56)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fathers Employment prior to incarceration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled/ Semi-Skilled</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(7%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>(93%)</td>
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Individual interviews of between 20-40 minutes were conducted within the prison by the first author and a research assistant. Despite researcher attempts to maintain a conversational manner, participants were initially cautious in their responses. While participants did not voice any hesitation with the interview being recorded, they appeared more relaxed when their accompanying officer left the room. Prisoners appeared to be keen to understand more about the researchers and where they were from. Rapport was developed as the researcher encouraged and answered any questions participants may have had. Throughout this interaction, researchers’ emphasised the unique position the participants had in understanding the experiences of incarcerated fathers and their families. The relationship between the researchers and the prison authorities was of particular interest for some participants. For example, researchers had to reassure some that anything said during the interview process was not going to be repeated to authorities. Additionally, researchers needed to reiterate that no additional benefits, such as enhanced visitation or special family leave, could be organised or influenced by the researchers.
An interview guide provided a loose structure within which to explore the topics of interest, and participants were prompted to expand on relevant and interesting responses. Topics included: (1) Challenges of parenting in prison, for example: “What are the challenges facing you as a father while imprisoned?” (2) Perceived evaluations of fatherhood, for example: “How would your partner describe you as a parent would you think?” (3) Relationship with other imprisoned fathers, for example: “would (you) talk to about parenting (with) any other fathers inside?” In order to protect the anonymity of the participant’s all names were changed in the transcripts and pseudonyms are used throughout this paper. Ethical approval was obtained from both the University of Limerick and the Irish Prison Service Ethical Review Boards.

Analysis

In order to conduct this exploration, a discursive analytical approach was adopted (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Potter, 1996). Recordings were initially listened to with and without transcripts in order to gain an understanding of the overall dataset. Transcripts were then encoded using Nvivo software. Guided by a social identity approach and taking an inclusive approach, all references to constructions of a father were selected, extracted and saved in a separated document (MacNaghten, 1993; Willig, 2013). So, for example, “obviously, as a father, you have to have some level of love for your children”, would be selected as it actively presents fatherhood in a particular manner. This resulted in 98 excerpts being identified. After re-reading, the excerpts were amalgamated by attending to evidence of conceptual commonalities between them. This resulted in 20 broad themes. Through a re-reading of these broad themes in conjunction with the original transcripts, 5 higher level themes were identified under which some of the broad themes might be combined. On a final read of transcripts the themes were
further refined with the intention of identifying deviant cases and contradictions to these themes, as well as ensuring that views of all the stakeholders were sufficiently captured. This resulted in three overarching conceptual themes relating to the experience of participants being identified by the first author. Excerpts were then analysed using principles derived from discursive psychology (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Potter, 1996). Specifically, the basis on which father identity was constructed, negotiated and used to achieve things in the talk (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998) was identified within the text. From this an account of what ‘typically’ or ‘usually’ occurs in the data was developed (Stevenson & Muldoon, 2010).

**Findings**

Three distinct themes relating to the construction of incarcerated father identity were identified. Theme 1, Uncontested fatherhood; *‘most of the dads in here come from a background I am from’*, Theme 2, Constrained and reframed fatherhood; *‘a father should be there for his kids’*, Theme 3, Reinterpreting offending behaviour as learning and growth for fatherhood, *‘(My strengths as being a father?) well I took drugs’*. Our analysis identified how imprisoned fathers are strategically using their different identities of prisoner and father in order to construct a positive claim to a father identity.

Theme one: Uncontested fatherhood; *‘most of the dads in here come from a background I am from’*

This theme demonstrates how fatherhood is constructed as an assumed identity. Participants did not think that their claim to fatherhood was not justifiable at any point, rather they showed awareness of the potential for negative appraisal as fathers. So this theme focuses on how participants perceive themselves as fathers and how that identity was always with them. Participants also resisted potential negative assessments by their
partner by referencing times where their credentials as parents were positive. Consequently, participants presented themselves as fathers that cannot be judged on the basis of their current enactment as fathers, and avoided negative appraisals altogether.

In extract 1, Mark first creates a negative image of an incarcerated father before contrasting it with his own more positive approach. For Mark, it is his concern for his children and his focus on his family is what positively differentiates his parenting from that of other incarcerated fathers. Throughout, Mark presents fatherhood as an assumed identity instead questioning the nature of the parenting rather than the legitimacy of the claim.

Extract 1, Mark

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<th>Interviewer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>would (you) talk to about parenting, (with) any other fathers inside?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Not really because most of the dad’s that come in here are</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>from a background that I’m from as well, disadvantaged areas,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>drug users, most of them are heroin users, they only care about</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>one thing. I won’t say they don’t care about their kids,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>obviously as a father you have to have some level of love for</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>your children but most of the fellas in here are just</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>concentrated on drugs and this and that, they don’t really care,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>once they have their drugs that’s it, they’re happy but with me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>I’m constantly worrying about my children</td>
<td></td>
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Mark begins his construction of an incarcerated father by first establishing his own position, see line 3-4; ‘most of the dads that come in here are from a background that I am from as well.’ In doing so, Mark demonstrates, not only his perceived expertise and authority to speak on the subject (Davies & Harre, 1999), but also presents fatherhood as an assumed identity. He undermines other fathers’ claim to a positive appraisal but never questions their access to their father identity. From his position of authority, Mark proceeds with a very negative description, drawing on stigmatising elements such as originating from ‘disadvantaged areas’ and ‘drug users’, see line 4-5. By pushing the description to an extreme formation Mark attempts to reinforce his negative description
against doubt and disagreement (Pomerantz, 1986). In line 7-8, Mark again emphasises the assumed nature of his father identity. By using the phrase ‘obviously, as a father’ Mark is using a rhetorical device to position himself within the identity (Davies & Harré, 1999). For Mark, it is not the legitimacy of his father identity but rather the potential for negative appraisal as a father.

In extract two we again see how fatherhood is constructed as an assumed identity. What is at stake is not the legitimacy of the incarcerated father’s claim to a father identity but negotiating and contesting negative appraisals of his performance as a father. Paul outlines how he imagines his partner views him as a father whilst at the same time undermines the authenticity of her assessment:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Extract 2, Paul</th>
<th>How would your partner describe you as a parent would you think?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Interviewer</td>
<td>How would your partner describe you as a parent would you think?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Paul</td>
<td>I suppose now she probably had a different version than me like but I think I’m, well I suppose I’m in jail now like, I’m a bad, she probably thinks I’m a bad father like but I suppose I’m good in ways like yeah. I’m good when I’m out anyway like. I was always taking them and doing things with them like. She’d probably say now I’m a cunt like when I’m inside here and like leave her on her own. I don’t blame her either</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In line 1 the interviewer orientates towards a potential difficult subject for the participant as it involves an imagined assessment of his performance in his role as a parent. In response, Paul adopts a discursive structure where the relevant response, i.e. his partners imagined assessment: See line 5, ‘she probably thinks I am a bad father’, is sandwiched between two counter arguments (Riley, 2003). Paul attempts to negate a negative assessment by first presenting it as being one of many potential versions (See line 3, ‘she probably had a different version than me’), before constructing the criticism as being limited.
Paul uses the discourse marker ‘but’ in line 5 as a denial-of-expectation (Lakoff, 1971) that incarceration is a sufficient criteria for a negative assessment; ‘but I suppose I am good in ways’. Paul then elaborates on this denial by contrasting his current imprisonment with an alternative time period when he is not imprisoned: ‘I am good when I am out anyway’ (see line 6), alluding to both time and situational factors. This approach is then insulated from argument with the term ‘anyway’, presenting the statement as an uncontroversional truth (See line 6). Paul then uses extreme case formation to highlight how he was, ‘always taking (the children) and doing things with them’, presenting this as an aspect of his parenting which is overlooked if only focusing on the situational and time limited aspects of his current imprisonment. Paul never orients to the legitimacy of his claims to fatherhood, rather he concentrates on countering potential negative evaluations of his performance in the role.

Theme Two, Constrained and reframed fatherhood; ‘a father should be there for his kids’

In theme two, fathers describe a version of fatherhood where a father is expected to be physically present with their children. Even when not involved the physical presence of the father is essential to constructing a positive father identity (McLaughlin & Muldoon, 2016). However, such a construction presented a dilemma as due to the restrictions imposed by their incarceration, participants were unable to meet this requirement. Consequently, imprisoned fathers presented their own constrained enactment of fatherhood as beyond their own control and compared themselves with others who they deem to be worse fathers. In doing so, participants were able to construct a more positive image of their own sense of themselves as fathers.

In extract 3, Robert describes the importance he places on a father being physically present in the family. Robert also outlines the difficulties he encounters in
engaging with family responsibilities. Ultimately for Robert, the physical absence from
the family results in a perception of being ineffective and powerless within the family
unit. Throughout the excerpt, Robert maintains an argument that he is doing as much as
he can but is constraint due to situational rather than personal factors:

Extract 3, Robert

1 Robert A father should, should be there for their kids like, you can’t be
2 there when you are doing jail like, you can’t be that’s the truth, you
3 are not there like you are not helping with your family, all you can
4 do is give them advice when they come in or whatever so try telling
5 them stuff like, and like they are only going to believe so much, and
6 they are only going to listen you so much like, there is nothing you
7 can do when you are in here, you are in here and that’s it. when you
8 get out you try and make up for lost time

Robert constructs a version of fatherhood that required the man to be physically present
for their children, see line 1: ‘A father should be there for their kids’. This description
reflects the elements outlined in the previous theme where fathers anticipated negative
assessments from others due to their absence from the family unit. Using the pronoun
‘you’ throughout the extract, Robert emphasises how he perceives this to be universally
held belief, see line 1-2; ‘you can’t be there when you are doing jail’.

Robert then uses extreme exclusive rhetoric and repetition throughout the piece (Riley,
2003), for example see lines 2-3; ‘you can’t be there’, ‘you can’t be there’, ‘you are not
there’, to emphasise that this is unattainable to incarcerated fathers’ no matter how hard
they may try. This argument emphasises the perceived situational rather than personal
constraints placed on incarcerated fatherhood. The three part nature of the statement
draws on elements of a three part list (Jefferson, 1990) where the speaker captures the
totality and normative nature of the statement (Goodman, 2008). Robert further
reinforces this position in line 2 by using the term, ‘that’s the truth’. In doing so, Robert
presents this opinion as an indisputable fact and so curtails any counter argument.
Ultimately, for Robert the consequence of his physical absence is his inability to enact his role as a father thereby compromising his father identity, see line 3: ‘you are not there [...] you are not helping with your family’.

Having established his inability to meet the requirements of fatherhood due to his absence from the children, Robert then orientates towards other potential avenues for contributing to the family: ‘all you can do is give them advice’ and ‘try telling them stuff’. By prefacing this statement with the terms: ‘all you can do’, and ‘try’, Robert communicates a sense of underperforming in the role. He describes the perceived inadequacy of this approach by outlining how the advice can only be given when the family decide to come in to visit, illustrating the fathers’ inability to instigate the interaction, see line 4; ‘when they come in’. Furthermore, other forms of communication open to the father in prison such as letters or phone calls are captured and dismissed in line 4 with the term: ‘or whatever’.

Once communication has been initiated, Robert describes his dissatisfaction with the nature of communication options available, again emphasising his perception that he is underperforming in the role of father, see line 5-6: ‘they are only going to believe you so much’ and they are only going to ‘listen to you so much’. By repeating the term ‘so much’, Robert focuses attention to the perceived lack of impact the father has on his family. Finally, Robert attempts to restrict discussion surrounding his view by again drawing on a three part list format along with repetition and extreme rhetoric in a categorical summation of his situation ‘when you are in here, you are in here and that’s it’.

While Robert, in extract 3, constructs imprisoned fatherhood in terms of absence and under-performance, Peter in Extract 4, represents it as a journey with the potential for
growth. Similar to Mark in Extract 1, Peter orientates towards alternative traits such as concern and openness. In doing so, Peter is able to create a more positive construction but also one which he can engage in during imprisonment. For Peter, it is the willingness and ability to engage with the difficulties of parenting from prison is what differentiates between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ imprisoned fathers:

Extract 4, Peter

1 Interviewer: You were saying that you can’t talk about fatherhood in here properly […] why is that?
2 Peter: The environment you are in. You are not going to, it’s not a topic of conversation you are going to have with some prisoners in here like, you know. In one way they would look at it what are you talking about that for, some of them in here don’t give a shit about their kids, there is other people do like but they just, they don’t know how to express it and talk about it. This group (I am with) now could be very, very good for that because you can go out and interact with people and see where you are going wrong and where they were going wrong and help each other along there like.

Peter constructs the prison environment as one where fatherhood is somewhat out of place: ‘the environment you are in, you are not going to (talk about fatherhood)’, (see line 3). Similarly to Robert, Peter uses the pronoun ‘you’, and establishes this feature as a global value rather than a personal held belief. Peter then claims that it is the reaction of other imprisoned fathers that is an integral restricting feature. Specifically, he describes how these reactions would close down the topic for discussion, minimising its importance; see line 5-6, ‘They would look at it what are you talking about that for’. He again presents this description as a universally held concept by qualifying it with the phrase ‘you know’ (see line 5) insulating the statement against argument and alternative interpretations.

Peter then begins to explain the reactions of imprisoned father in negative terms such as a lack of concern for their children, see line 7: ‘(they) don’t give a shit about their kids’, or
in terms of being unable to engage in discussions surrounding parenting concerns, see line 8: 'they are not able to express it or talk about it'. This lack of inclination or ability is then set in contrast with his own approach and with that of similar others: see line 9, 'this group now could be very, very good for that'. For Peter, the positive approach of this group of fathers, of which he is a part, is what enables him to engage with the difficulties he faces as a parent and learn from the experience: 'you can go out and interact with people and see where you are going wrong’ (See line 10-11). Finally, by using the metaphor of a journey, Peter constructs a positive and progressive narrative of growth, for example see line 12: ‘and help others along the way’. While for Robert, in extract 5, the imprisonment ends his ability to constructively engage as a father, Peter constructs imprisonment as a site of potential learning and improvement. As such, Peter is able to positively compare his own engagement against other prisoners who are unable or less inclined to engage in the role of father during imprisonment.

Theme Three: Reinterpreting offending behaviour as learning and growth for fatherhood, ‘(My strengths as being a father?) well I took drugs’.

Theme three captures how participants drew on their antisocial past as the basis for defining their parenting ability. When asked about their own strengths a father, participants spoke about their criminal behaviour and how such expertise enable them to guide and protect their children more effectively. For example, Peter in extract 5 orientates towards his ability to guide and protect his children when describing his strengths as a father (see line 2, 'it’s knowing where they are going to go wrong in life.’

Extract 5, Peter
1 Interviewer What do you think your strengths as a farther actually are?
2 Peter It’s knowing where they are going to go wrong in life,
3 I went through the whole lot of that.
Using the phrase ‘going to go wrong’, in line 2, Peter describes the potential of the child making similar mistakes as a certainty rather than a possibility. Using extreme case formation, Peter emphasises that it is the extensiveness of his past indiscretions that is the basis for his current abilities: see line 3, ‘I went through the whole lot of that’. In doing so, Peter creates a situation where the greater the criminality the more extensive the knowledge base.

Similarly, in extract 6, John draws on his antisocial past in a narrative of learned mistakes and repair in order to describe the strengths he has as a father. However, as illustrated in theme one, combining imprisonment with being a ‘good’ father can be problematic. Consequently, John attempts to minimise the negative implications of having criminal record:

Similarly to Peter, by emphasising the extensiveness of the offending, John is trying to make a stronger case for his parenting strengths. Initially, in line 2, John uses extreme case formation indicting that he has made every mistake’ and again in line 3 with ‘all his bad ways’. While such a statement of anti-social behaviour is not usually presented as a parenting strength, John immediately emphasises the rehabilitation and learning process that has occurred as a consequence of the mistakes: see line 3, ‘I have fixed all my bad ways’.

Extract 6, John
1  Interviewer  What are your strengths as a father?
2  John       I have learned every mistake I’d say in the book so I have to be able to, you know, I fixed all my bad ways and I 100% believe that, you know, and I have done everything in my power for the sake of my child and now my second child so, you know, this is a new chapter for me, you know that kind of way, and it was all driving offences so, you know,
3  John       What can I do only stay off the road
4  Interviewer What would you say is your weakness as a father?
5  John       Having this behind me I suppose, you know, this one yolk
In line 2, John draws on a metaphor of a book. In using a commonplace metaphor, John is able to equate his behaviour to a common occurring event. The use of statistics in line 3, ‘I fixed all of my bad ways, I 100% believe that’, underlines John’s belief that the behaviour is indeed in the past and he has learned and is reformed. His dedication as a parent throughout this process is emphasised again through extreme formation in lines 4-5: ‘I have done everything in my power for the sake of my child and now my second child’. The use of the phrase, ‘in my power’, John anticipates the potential argument that some aspects of this learning process may not have been positive experiences for his children, but insulates himself from criticism as such events were outside of his control. This sense of rehabilitation is reinforced in line 6 in another book related metaphor: ‘this is a new chapter for me’. While the book in line 2 indicated a finite knowable element, the new chapter indicates possibility and a new beginning.

In contrast to line 2, where John emphasised an extensive criminal past in order to present the extent of his learning, in line 7 John attempts to specify and minimise his past offending: ‘It was all driving offences, so you know’. In doing so, John is able to present his reform as plausible and achievable with one simple change of behaviour: see lines 8, ‘what can I do only stay off the road’.

In line 7 the interviewer orientates towards the assessment of his weaknesses as a father. In response, John indicates an ideological dilemma in that his ‘bad ways’ may also represent his weakness as a father: having this behind me’. While indicating his present incarceration as a potential weakness, John also attempts to minimise the impact by using the phrase: ‘this one yoke’, (See line 8). Irish slang indicating a minor and inconsequential inconvenience.
Finally, Brian in extract 8 again draws on his past criminal behaviour as a positive asset in assessing his strengths as a father. In doing so, he also acknowledges the dilemma of waiting for his child to be in difficulty in order to utilise his own unique expertise:

Extract 7, Brian

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Interviewer</th>
<th>Brian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yeah, and what would you say your (strengths as a father are)</td>
<td>As being a father… well I took drugs and everything so I know what it’s about so, I know what the downfalls and I think I’d have an advantage, God forbid if my kids ever did, am, come to drugs, then I’d see signs earlier, d’you know.</td>
</tr>
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Similar to the previous extracts, Brian uses extreme case formation in order to emphasise the extent of his criminal behaviour: see line 2, ‘*I took drugs and everything’*. For Brian, it is the extent and severity of his behaviour that provides him with the skills in protecting his own child: ‘*I know what it’s about, so I know what the downfalls (are)*’ (see lines 2-3). Brian uses then this knowledge in emphasising his unique advantage over others who may not have such experiences: see line 3 ‘*I would have an advantage’*, and line 4 ‘*I’d spot the signs earlier’*, increasing the chance of successful supporting the child away from a life of addiction.

However, adopting a position whereby his strengths as a father are built on his children’s descent into drug addiction can be problematic, as Brian may appear to be in some way wishing an addiction on to his son. Consequently, in line 3, Brian attempts to inoculate himself against such argument by proclaiming his wish for it never to be an issue; ‘*God forbid if my kids ever did’*.

**Conclusion**

Our findings suggest that for participants in the current study, father identity is assumed rather than actively claimed. The legitimacy of these imprisoned men’s claims
to fatherhood was not seriously questioned by themselves or by their account of their partners and families. However, participants anticipated a negative assessment as being a ‘Bad Father’ as a consequence of their current incarceration. Consequently, fathers in the study actively contest such an assessment as any evaluation was deemed to be limited due to time and situational constraints of their current incarceration. In contrast, participants attempted to construct a more positive image by making comparisons with other more negative approaches such as heroin users. Additionally, the constrained nature of their interaction with their children was presented as outside their control. At the same time, fathers were conflicted as their construction of a good father inherently included being present for their children which their current incarceration prohibited. Finally, fathers believed their prisoner identity and history of criminal behaviour was compatible with their identity as parents and could be harnessed in order to create positive parenting into the future.

These findings enhance our understanding of how we construct our different identities. Identification can occur through a process of comparison reliant on the accessibility and fit. Individuals who do not adhere to the ‘in-group norms’ can find their membership of the group contested. For incarcerated men, enactment of identity can be seen as problematic. Reflecting this, Uggen and McElrath (2014) and Genty (2012) comment on how popular constructions of prisoner and father are incompatible and so undermine prisoners’ potential claim a parental identity. However, our findings do not reflect this. We found that men in our study saw their claim to fatherhood as legitimate and uncontested. This group of fathers here, albeit those involved in a parenting programme, constructed their past criminal behaviour as comparable with fathering. This was because it allowed them to learn and grow and therefore advise their children as to how to avoid the mistakes they made. As such, fatherhood can be considered to be a roust identity
where fatherhood can be considered a vehicle through which efforts to support reintegration into the community can be channelled.

Consequently, these results have implications for policy surrounding supporting families affected by parental incarceration. While recent years have seen an increase in parenting programmes aimed at supporting meaningful family integration during paternal incarceration, understanding how incarcerated fathers construct and understand their father identity is essential if we are to provide supports drawing on this very identity. Father identity is presented as a valued identity for these men. The assumed nature of the father identity provides a potential anchor for intervention or support initiatives. This is particularly evident in areas where their experiences of incarceration and anti-social behaviour can be constructed as potential resources for guiding their children in the future. Interventions aimed at improving post release reintegration of incarcerated fathers can orient towards improving family relations by providing opportunities for meaningful family engagement during imprisonment.

Finally, discursive analysis brings with it a number of limitations. Many, if not all of these men have experienced an interview situation as part of their arrest and subsequent trial. As a result, the interview context of the current study may bring with it connotations relating to an adversarial prisoner interviewer scenario rather than conversational tone sought by the interviewer. The sensitive nature of the questions as well as the vulnerable position of the men involved may have resulted in men adopting a guarded position throughout the interviews. While every effort was taken to create a calm and balanced environment, it is unlikely that this did not affect the responses. Additionally, qualitative research is characterised by a small population, so caution needs to be exercised in generalising findings. Finally, participants in this study were recruited from a small population of fathers who themselves were enrolled in a parenting support
group. Despite these limitations, this study provides a vital insight into how compromised and potentially stigmatised identities are constructed and strategically managed in order to create and maintain positive self-image.
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Chapter Three

The Association of Parental Incarceration with child behaviour and self-concept over time:

Results from a population cohort study

A version of this manuscript is published in Child: Care Health and Development
The negative association of parental incarceration with children’s emotional and behavioural development: Results from a population cohort study

Abstract

Research exploring parental incarceration (PI) is seen to be negatively associated with positive developmental outcomes for children affected. However, findings in this area often reports conflicting results with few studies following children across time. This study used data from two waves of a population representative cohort study of children aged 9 years and followed up aged 13 years living in the Republic of Ireland. Children (n=50) who had experienced PI by the age of nine were compared to children who had not experienced PI across demographic and psychological indicators. Children who had experienced PI came from more socially disadvantaged homes and were more likely to have experienced other Stressful life events. Using the strength and difficulty questionnaire, Piers Harris self-concept scale, and accounting for socio-demographics and other SLE’s, results indicate that, whilst there were no long term differences in children’s self-concept between groups. However, PI did have a medium-term association with care-giver assessments of emotional and behavioural problems.

Keywords (4-6) child development, child mental health, child self-concept, Growing Up in Ireland, parental incarceration, SDQ.

Abbreviations: Parental Incarceration (PI), Primary Care-giver (PCG) Significant life events (SLE)

A version of this manuscript is currently under review at Journal of applied developmental Psychology
Introduction

Similar to other western countries, Ireland experienced a rise in prison population in the latter part of the 20th century, reaching a peak of 4,600 inmates in 2011. This represented an increase of almost 100% during the period 2007-2011 (IPRT, 2017). One of the unforeseen consequences of this increase is that more families are affected. For example, in the US, estimates are that as many as 1 in 4 children of African Americans experience parental incarceration (PI) during their childhood (Wildeman, 2009). Murray and colleagues (2014) found evidence that PI increases the risk of anti-social behaviour in childhood and mental health problems, poor educational performance and drug use. However, other authors using comparative cross-national analysis across Europe argue that the effects of PI are not universal but may differ across socio-political contexts (Besemer et al., 2011). For example, Murray and colleagues (2014) highlight how contextual factors such as poverty, maternal education level, being from a single parent home, as well as mental illness or drug abuse in the immediate family may all contribute to negative outcomes in the context of PI. This has led researchers to disagree about whether PI is a marker or a causal factor in youth mal-adaptation and adjustment. Without question, this remains a very difficult issue to address and there have been clear calls for further research in this area (Poehlmann & Eddy, 2010; Murray, Farrington, Sekol & Olsen, 2010, Haskins, 2015).

Haskins (2015) argues that early childhood represents a critical period in a child’s emotional, behavioural and social development and can be negatively impacted by PI. Exposure to PI can disrupt the care-giving environment of children as well as undermine attachment patterns between the child and their primary carers (Poehlmann, 2010). Children’s self-perceptions in such disrupted care-giving environments can be undermined and negatively impact their sense of value and self (Cicchetti & Lynch,
Additionally, poor self-perceptions confer increased risk of developing externalising and internalising difficulties (Flynn, Cicchetti & Rogosch, 2014; Troop-Gordon & Ladd, 2005). Previous research found that for boys, exposure to PI in the first 10 years of their life doubles their risk of future behavioural and internalising difficulties (Murray & Farrington, 2008). Furthermore, in a review of the literature, Miller (2006) found that children exposed to PI can suffer long term psychological effects such as depression, anxiety and emotional difficulties. Conversely, a number of other studies have found no association between PI and mental health or behavioural problems (Kinner, Alati, Najman & Williams, 2007; Murray, Janson, & Farrington, 2007) again emphasising the need for further research in this area.

Differing penal and social contexts may account for some of these mixed results (Farrington & Loeber, 1999). For example, PI is not randomly distributed in the population (Murray 2005). Households and families affected by incarceration tend to be; poorer, affected by substance misuse, and report higher levels of negative life events (Myers et al., 1999). Life stress is known to have a very real consequence on child outcomes and children from incarcerated homes will be exposed to multiple risks by virtue of the nature of those homes affected by incarceration (Murray, Farrington & Sekol, 2012). For this reason, it is important that any observed association between PI and child outcomes is attributable to the incarceration rather than the accumulated life stress (Dallaire, Zeman, & Thrash, 2015).

Longitudinal designs allow us to examine, and control for, the effects of hypothesized predictor variables, such as PI at an earlier time point, on outcome variables at a later time point. Moreover, longitudinal designs facilitate the testing of potential bidirectional relationships between variables. However, a major limitation of large quantitative data sets is the reliance on adult reporting of child outcomes (Johnston &
Easterling, 2012). More research is called for using multi-informant perspectives when researching children’s internalising and externalising difficulties as well as in understanding the lived experiences of those affected (De Los Reyes et al. 2015).

Current Study

Using a national representative sample of Irish children we addressed the question: Is children’s psychological adjustment associated with PI? Specifically, we were interested in the relationship between PI before the age of 9 and children’s psychological adjustment, and whether this experience still had an association when the child is 13. In doing so, the present study contributes to the literature in two ways. First, the present paper contributes a more nuanced picture of the relationship between PI and children’s psychological adjustment by including measures from the child’s and the parents perspectives and following these perspectives as the child develops (Haskins, 2015). Additionally, this study provides longitudinal analysis of a previously unstudied national context, Ireland. We test the following hypotheses: (1), Children who have experienced PI (by Wave 1) will have increased levels of difficulties compared to children who have not experienced PI even when we match for social demographics and experience of other stressful life events. (2), PI, over and above social demographics and experience of other stressful life events, will make a unique contribution to variation in children’s psychological adjustment outcomes at both Wave 1 and Wave 2.

Methods

Participants, procedure

This study used data collected in the first two waves of the Growing up in Ireland National Longitudinal Study of Children (GUI) (Murray et al., 2011). GUI is a population representative cohort study of children living in the Republic of Ireland which commenced...
in 2007/2008 when the children were aged nine. A two-stage sampling method was used, with children and their families selected through the primary school education system. A representative sample of 910 schools (82% response rate) agreed to participate. 15,000 randomly selected families from within these schools were selected and 8,568 (57% response rate) agreed to participate. Data was re-weighted to represent the population of nine year olds in Ireland using information from the 2006 Census of Population. This weighting system accounted for features such as socio-economic status, household characteristics and social class (see Murray et al. [2011] for further information). Data collection was performed by trained interviewers through computer-assisted personal interviews and questionnaires with primary and secondary care-givers, children, teachers and school principals. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. GUI was subject to ethical review by the Irish Health Research Board’s Research Ethics Committee.

**Design and Approach to Analysis**

This study benefits from a longitudinal design. The sample (N = 8,568) in 2007/8 (Wave 1) represents 1 in 7 of all nine year old children living in Ireland at that time. The second wave of the study was carried out in 2011/12 when the children were aged 13 with an 87% follow up rate (n=7,423).

Our Wave 1 analysis compares the demographic characteristics of those children who were reported to have had prior experience of PI to the other study children. We also compare beliefs and attitudes held by the children about themselves (self-concept); externalising and internalising difficulties (as reported by the primary care giver (PCG)) and the experience of other potentially stressful life events. Our Wave 2 analysis considers whether any differences in outcomes between the two groups remain over time.
The current study used linear regression models to explore the relationship between PI and child mental health outcomes. This was chosen over other methods such as propensity score matching, for several reasons. While in conducting research with children impacted by PI, propensity score matching is growing in popularity as the preferred choice of analyses (Copp, Giordano, Manning & Longmore, 2017), there is still much debate about the suitability of this approach. This is due to concerns surrounding the assumption of strong ignorability and non-zero probability (Loughran, Wilson, Nagin, & Piquero, 2015). Addressing this debate, we attempted to create a matching group using propensity score matching. As suggested by previous research (Turney & Wildeman, 2014), we used matching variables such as gender of the child, socio-economic status, primary care-giver education, primary care-giver age, alcohol and drugs in the family. A control was considered a match for a case if the absolute difference in the propensity scores from the logistic regression was less than or equal to a match tolerance of 0.005. However, the matching algorithm was unable to match across all variables and results indicated significant differences between cases and controls on key variables such as partner in the home, gender of the child and experiences of potentially adverse life events. Considering the limitations of using propensity matched controls for this population (Copp et al., 2017) as well as our inability to create equal groups, we chose to proceed using linear regression models and controlling for potentially confounding variables as outlined below.

Measures

**Socio-demographics**

Socio-demographics relating to the family was reported by the PCG and included age, gender, ethnicity and highest level of education (primary, secondary, tertiary) of the PCG, whether there was a partner in the home, and percentage of the household’s income
(< 50%, ≥ 50%) derived from social welfare payments such as unemployment assistance, carers allowance, and disability allowance.

**Parental Incarceration**

At Wave 1, PCGs were asked to indicate whether the study child had ever experienced a list of potentially stressful life events. This included the question ‘Has the child ever experienced a parent in prison?’ (Dichotomous response of yes/no).

**Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire**

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 1997) is a 25 item behavioural screening questionnaire administered to the child’s primary care-giver (GUI, 2010). This scale has been previously used to assess mental health difficulties in the context of PI (Shehadeh, et al., 2015), and includes five subscales: emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer relationship problems and pro-social behaviour, each with five items. Responses to each item were measured on a Likert scale ranging from 0 (Not True) to 2 (Certainly True). The Total Difficulties Score is generated by the sum of four of the sub-scales: Emotional Symptoms; Conduct Problems; Hyperactivity; and Peer Relationship Problems with higher scores indicating more problem behaviour. Values of Cronbach’s alpha for the subscales in GUI ranged from 0.52 for Peer relationship problems to 0.74 for Hyperactivity (Nixon, 2012). Total Difficulties Score as well as the five subscale scores are reported.

**Pier-Harris II**

Pier-Harris II (Piers & Herzberg, 2002) is a 60-item scale measuring self-concept of the study child (i.e., a set of attitudes and beliefs the study child has about themselves which are relatively stable over time). The child reads the 60 items and decides whether
items apply to them, or not. This scale has been widely used in previous studies as a measure of psychological well-being in children (GUI, 2010) both in the general population (Hannan & Halpin, 2014) as well as in the context of PI (Block & Potthast, 1998; Hanlon et al., 2004). The scale includes six subscales which are summed to give a total score from 1 to 80 with lower scores indicating more negative self-concept and scores between 45 and 55 considered average (Piers & Herzberg, 2002). The six subscales measure behavioral adjustment, intellectual and school status, physical appearance, freedom from anxiety, popularity, and happiness & satisfaction (GUI, 2010). All subscales had acceptable reliability in GUI (Cronbach’s alpha ≥ 0.70).

Analyses

Weighted counts and percentages are presented for categorical data. Numeric data was tested for normality and presented as mean (standard deviation) for normally distributed data and median (interquartile range or first quartile, third quartile) for skewed data. Means were compared across groups using an independent samples t-test. Medians were compared across groups using non-parametric tests. A chi-square test was used to test for significant associations between categorical variables. A 5% level of significance was used for all hypothesis tests with no adjustment made for multiple testing. To determine effect size, Cramer’s V coefficient was used as a measure of the strength of the association, where ≥0.1, ≥0.3 and ≥0.5 represent a weak, moderate or strong association respectively. Linear regression models were used to predict numeric outcomes after first adjusting for socio-demographic variables (age and highest level of education of PCG, percentage of the household income from social welfare, partner in the home and gender of the child) and then adjusting for experiencing stressful life events (conflict between parents, mental disorder in the immediate family, drugs/alcohol in the immediate family and a stay in foster
care). R squared was used as a measure of goodness of fit. SPSS Version 22 for Windows was used for the statistical analysis.

Results

Profile of Children affected by PI

Fifty of the 8,568 children (weighted percentage 0.9%) were reported to have experienced a PI by the age of nine. As shown in Table 1, the households of children who had experienced PI were more likely to be headed by a younger mother and also less likely to have a partner in the home. The PCG of these children was also more likely to have attained a lower level of education and a higher percentage of household income came from social welfare payments. The groups did not differ by ethnicity of the PCG.

Table 1. Socio-demographic variables by group at Wave 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Parental Incarceration</th>
<th>P-value</th>
<th>Cramer’s V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes (n=50)</td>
<td>No (n=8,518)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age of PCG (IQR)</td>
<td>34 (10.25)</td>
<td>40 (7)</td>
<td>.001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest level of education</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>6 (12%)</td>
<td>280 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>23 (46%)</td>
<td>3899 (46%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>21 (42%)</td>
<td>4339 (51%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCG’s relationship to the child¹</td>
<td>Biological Parent</td>
<td>43 (86%)</td>
<td>8417 (99%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grandparent/ Foster parent</td>
<td>7 (14%)</td>
<td>101 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner in House</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>28 (56%)</td>
<td>964 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>22 (44%)</td>
<td>7554 (89%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity of PCG</td>
<td>White Irish</td>
<td>47 (94%)</td>
<td>7750 (91%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3 (6%)</td>
<td>760 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of household’s income derived from Social Welfare</td>
<td>&lt;50%</td>
<td>32 (64%)</td>
<td>7828 (93%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50%-100%</td>
<td>18 (36%)</td>
<td>609 (7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹Primary care-givers of PI group were all female

*P <.05, **P <.001
Other stressful life events

Children who had experienced PI were also more likely to have experienced other potentially stressful life events compared to other children in the cohort (see Table 2). The largest effects were seen for having experienced drugs/alcohol in the immediate family, a mental disorder in the immediate family, conflict between parents, parents’ divorce/separation and a stay in foster care (Cramer’s V >0.10).

Table 2. Experiencing potentially stressful life events by group at Wave 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental Incarceration</th>
<th>P-value</th>
<th>Cramer’s V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes (n=50)</td>
<td>No (n=8,518)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ divorce/separation</td>
<td>29 (58%)</td>
<td>865 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving house</td>
<td>40 (80%)</td>
<td>3496 (41%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay in Foster care</td>
<td>8 (16%)</td>
<td>63 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs/Alcohol in immediate family</td>
<td>23 (46%)</td>
<td>189 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental disorder in immediate family</td>
<td>15 (30%)</td>
<td>231 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict between parents</td>
<td>36 (72%)</td>
<td>822 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death of a parent</td>
<td>5 (10%)</td>
<td>124 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death of a close family member</td>
<td>18 (36%)</td>
<td>3548 (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death of a close friend</td>
<td>7 (14%)</td>
<td>474 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving Country</td>
<td>11 (22%)</td>
<td>900 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious Illness/Injury to Self</td>
<td>5 (10%)</td>
<td>389 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious Illness/Injury to Family member</td>
<td>11 (22%)</td>
<td>1157 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5 (10%)</td>
<td>150 (2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P <.05, **P <.001

Psychological Adjustment at Wave 1

Partially supporting our hypothesis, PCGs of children who had experienced PI reported higher levels of internalising and externalising difficulties as measured by Total difficulties (mean of 12.52 vs 7.36, p<.001). PCGs also reported higher scores for Emotional (p<.001), Conduct (p<.001), Hyperactivity (p<.001), and Peer Relationship Problems (p<.001) subscales than those reported by PCGs of other children (see Model 1, Table 3). After adjusting for socio-demographic variables, having experienced PI remained
a statistically significant predictor of these outcomes ($p< .05$, see Model 2, Table 3). However, adjusting for the experience of other potentially stressful life events accounted for most of these differences with having experienced PI a statistically significant predictor of only total difficulties and peer relationship problems after adjustment ($p<0.05$, see Model 3, Table 3).

Children who had experienced PI reported lower total self-concept (mean of 43.17 vs. 46.98 for those who had not experienced PI, $p=0.002$) though the mean score for these children was only slightly lower than the average classification for this scale (45-55) (Piers & Herzberg, 2002). Children who had experienced PI also reported more anxiety ($p<.001$), less behavioral adjustment ($p=0.004$) and lower levels of happiness ($p=0.04$) and popularity ($p=0.002$) than other children (see Model 1, Table 3). After adjusting for socio-demographic variables, having experienced PI remained a statistically significant predictor of these outcomes ($p< .05$, see Model 2, Table 3).

However, adjusting for the experience of other potentially stressful life events accounted for most of these differences with having experienced PI a statistically significant predictor only for levels of behavioral adjustment as reported by the study child ($p=0.03$, see Model 3, Table 3).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental Incarceration</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes (n=50) M(SD)</td>
<td>t statistic (p-value)¹</td>
<td>t statistic (p-value)²</td>
<td>t statistic (p-value)³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No (n=8,518) M(SD)</td>
<td>t statistic (p-value)¹</td>
<td>t statistic (p-value)²</td>
<td>t statistic (p-value)³</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SDQ**
- **Total**: 12.52 (7.47) vs. 7.36 (5.00)
  - Model 1: 7.23 (<.001)**
  - Model 2: 5.03 (<.001)**
  - Model 3: 5.19 (.03)*
- **Emotional**: 3.52 (2.60) vs. 2.00 (1.97)
  - Model 1: 5.42 (<.001)**
  - Model 2: 3.81 (.13)
- **Conduct**: 2.32 (2.30) vs. 1.25 (1.43)
  - Model 1: 5.30 (<.001)**
  - Model 2: 3.81 (.13)
- **Hyperactivity**: 4.42 (2.77) vs. 2.97 (2.42)
  - Model 1: 4.02 (<.001)**
  - Model 2: 2.68 (.067)
- **Peer**: 2.26 (1.96) vs. 1.13 (1.43)
  - Model 1: 5.53 (<.001)**
  - Model 2: 3.75 (.03)*
- **Prosocial**: 8.71 (2.04) vs. 8.88 (1.42)
  - Model 1: -1.21 (.225)
  - Model 2: -1.28 (.20)
  - Model 3: -1.79 (.43)

**Piers Harris**
- **Total**: 43.17 (8.61) vs. 46.98 (8.33)
  - Model 1: 3.09 (.002)*
  - Model 2: -2.16 (.03)*
  - Model 3: -1.03 (.30)
- **Behavioral adjustment**: 10.61 (2.84) vs. 11.88 (2.32)
  - Model 1: 3.03 (.004)*
  - Model 2: -2.99 (.003)*
  - Model 3: -2.16 (.03)*
- **School**: 12.19 (2.73) vs. 12.49 (2.78)
  - Model 1: -.74 (.46)
  - Model 2: -.18 (.85)
  - Model 3: .59 (.56)
- **Physical Appearance**: 7.49 (2.09) vs. 7.66 (2.25)
  - Model 1: .50 (.61)
  - Model 2: -.15 (.88)
  - Model 3: .49 (.62)
- **Anxiety Free**: 9.35 (3.07) vs. 10.90 (2.82)
  - Model 1: 3.80 (<.001)**
  - Model 2: -2.80 (.005)*
  - Model 3: -1.56 (.13)
- **Popularity**: 7.67 (2.55) vs. 8.74 (2.36)
  - Model 1: 3.14 (.002)*
  - Model 2: -2.11 (.04)*
  - Model 3: -1.96 (.34)
- **Happiness**: 8.30 (1.68) vs. 8.78 (1.58)
  - Model 1: 2.08 (.04)*
  - Model 2: -1.16 (.25)
  - Model 3: -.18 (.86)

¹ From independent samples t-test across groups
² From linear regression model after adjustment for socio-demographic variables
³ From linear regression model after adjustment for socio-demographic variables and experience of other life events
*P <.05, **P <.001

**Psychological Adjustment at Wave 2**
The second wave of the study was carried out when the children were aged 13 with an 87% follow up (n=7,423) in the full cohort and a 76% follow up (n=38) for children who had experienced PI by the age of nine. Twelve children (24%) who had experienced incarceration prior to the age of nine did not participate in the study at age 13.

Results indicated that children affected by PI reported increased levels of behavioural adjustment (p=0.02) and popularity (p=0.001) from their scores at Time 1 (see Table 4). PCG’s of the study child reported no difference in level of difficulties as measured by the SDQ (p>.05). There was no significant difference in changes between time points in Piers Harris or SDQ levels between children who had experienced PI and those who had not (See Table 4).

Table 4 summarises SDQ and Piers-Harris total scores and subscale scores by group at Wave 2. Hypothesis were partially supported as PCGs continued to report higher total SDQ difficulties scores for children who had experienced PI (mean of 11.41

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes (n=38)</th>
<th>No (n=7479)</th>
<th>t statistic (p-value)²</th>
<th>t statistic (p-value)³</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M(SD)</td>
<td>M(SD)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDQ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>-.58 (.57)</td>
<td>-.84 (4.33)</td>
<td>-.67 (.51)</td>
<td>.37 (.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>-.15 (2.30)</td>
<td>.24 (1.96)</td>
<td>-.42 (.67)</td>
<td>-1.23 (.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct</td>
<td>.05 (1.94)</td>
<td>.15 (1.41)</td>
<td>-.17 (.87)</td>
<td>-.42 (.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperactivity</td>
<td>.53 (2.14)</td>
<td>.42 (2.03)</td>
<td>1.51 (.14)</td>
<td>.35 (.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer</td>
<td>.15 (2.05)</td>
<td>.05 (1.52)</td>
<td>-.48 (.64)</td>
<td>.43 (.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosocial</td>
<td>.08 (1.78)</td>
<td>.06 (1.54)</td>
<td>.27 (.79)</td>
<td>.06 (.95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piers Harris</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>-2.47 (10.47)</td>
<td>-.99 (9.54)</td>
<td>-1.38 (.18)</td>
<td>-.90 (.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural Adjustment</td>
<td>-1.26 (3.11)</td>
<td>-.70 (2.67)</td>
<td><strong>2.39 (.02)</strong></td>
<td>-1.23 (.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>1.09 (3.89)</td>
<td>.33 (3.53)</td>
<td>1.63 (.11)</td>
<td>1.25 (.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phys Appearance</td>
<td>-.24 (2.97)</td>
<td>-.22 (2.80)</td>
<td>.03 (.65)</td>
<td>-.03 (.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety free</td>
<td>-.94 (3.33)</td>
<td>.14 (3.39)</td>
<td>-1.70 (.10)</td>
<td>-1.9 (.056)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popularity</td>
<td>-1.59 (2.54)</td>
<td>-1.04 (2.71)</td>
<td>3.73 (.001)**</td>
<td>-1.21 (.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>-.11 (1.89)</td>
<td>.18 (2.07)</td>
<td>-0.36 (.72)</td>
<td>-.83 (.36)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 From independent samples t-test between groups at Time 2
2 From independent samples t-test Mean Difference within PI group between time points
3 From independent samples t-test Mean Difference between PI and non-PI groups between time points
*P<.05, **P<.01,
vs. 6.42 for those who hadn’t experienced PI, \(p<0.001\), Emotional difficulties (3.59 vs. 1.76, \(p<.001\)), Conduct (2.03 vs. 1.08, \(p<.001\)), Hyperactivity (3.75 vs. 2.53, \(p<.001\)) and Peer difficulty (2.03 vs. 1.06, \(p<.001\)) (See model 1, Table 6) After adjusting for socio-demographic variables, having experienced PI remained a statistically significant predictor of these outcomes (\(p< .05\), see Model 2, Table 6). Further, adjusting for the experience of other potentially stressful life events, having experienced PI remained a statistically significant predictor for total difficulties and emotional problems (\(p<0.05\), see Model 3, Table 6) over time. There was no difference across groups in total self-concept as reported by the child at Wave 2 (mean of 45.95 vs. 48.02, \(p=0.13\)) with means for both groups in the average classification for this scale (45-55).

Table 5. Wave 2 Emotional, behavioural and psychological outcomes by group at Wave 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Parental Incarceration</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes (n=38) M(SD)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No (n=7,485) M(SD)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDQ</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11.41 (6.99)</td>
<td>6.42 (4.95)</td>
<td>4.33 ((&lt;.001)**</td>
<td>4.44 ((&lt;.001)**</td>
<td>1.99 ((.046))**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>3.59 (2.58)</td>
<td>1.76 (1.91)</td>
<td>4.32 ((&lt;.001)**</td>
<td>4.49 ((&lt;.001)**</td>
<td>2.63 ((.01)**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conduct</td>
<td>2.03 (2.06)</td>
<td>1.08 (1.35)</td>
<td>2.81 ((&lt;.001)**</td>
<td>2.99 ((&lt;.001)**</td>
<td>1.14 (</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hyperactivity</td>
<td>3.75 (2.54)</td>
<td>2.53 (2.32)</td>
<td>3.22 ((&lt;.001)**</td>
<td>2.10 ((&lt;.001)**</td>
<td>0.44 ((.66))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peer</td>
<td>2.03 (2.34)</td>
<td>1.06 (1.42)</td>
<td>2.51 ((&lt;.02))**</td>
<td>3.08 ((&lt;.002))**</td>
<td>1.53 ((.13))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prosocial</td>
<td>8.62 (1.82)</td>
<td>8.83 (1.48)</td>
<td>-0.85 ((.40))</td>
<td>-0.66 ((.51))</td>
<td>0.67 ((.50))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45.95 (9.15)</td>
<td>48.02 (8.28)</td>
<td>-1.51 ((.13))</td>
<td>-0.42 ((.68))</td>
<td>0.41 ((.68))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Behavioral adjustment</td>
<td>12.08 (2.27)</td>
<td>12.61 (2.07)</td>
<td>-1.54 ((.12))</td>
<td>-0.98 ((.33))</td>
<td>-0.27 ((.98))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School</td>
<td>11.24 (3.37)</td>
<td>12.17 (3.08)</td>
<td>-1.84 ((.07))</td>
<td>-0.69 ((.49))</td>
<td>-0.02 ((.98))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>7.70 (2.74)</td>
<td>7.88 (2.39)</td>
<td>-0.44 ((.66))</td>
<td>-0.34 ((.73))</td>
<td>0.74 ((.46))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appearance</td>
<td>10.24 (3.63)</td>
<td>10.78 (2.96)</td>
<td>-0.90 ((.37))</td>
<td>-0.57 ((.57))</td>
<td>0.18 ((.86))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Popularity</td>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>----------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.51 (2.43)</td>
<td>8.35 (1.72)</td>
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1 From independent samples t-test across groups  
2 From linear regression model after adjustment for socio-demographic variables  
3 From linear regression model after adjustment for socio-demographic variables and experience of other life events  
*P <0.05, **P <0.001

**Discussion**

While Parental Incarceration is seen to be negatively associated children affected, research in this area often reports conflicting results with few studies following children across time. To address this the current paper investigated the effect of experiencing PI before the age of 9 on children’s psychological adjustment and whether this experience still had an effect when the child is 13. Findings emphasize the array of life stressors experienced by children affected by PI. Those who report PI at age 9 are more likely to have a lower socioeconomic status and have increased likelihood of experiencing many negative life events. Previous research indicates that, the cumulative effect of these negative experiences expose children to an increased risk of difficulties in psychological adjustment as well as future mental health and behavioural issues (McMahon, Grant, Compas, Thurm, & Ey, 2003; Appleyard et al., 2005). Findings also emphasise that PI had a short-term association with child reported self-concept and a medium term association with care-giver reported emotional and behavioural difficulties. Our hypotheses were partially supported. Differences in child-reported behavioural adjustment between the two groups as well as total difficulties and peer difficulties as reported by the PCG were observed. Additionally, the association was still significant after adjustment for socioeconomic status and potentially negative life experiences at Wave 1. Results from the second wave of the study indicated that PCGs of children
affected by PI continued to report more problem behaviour overall than PCGs of other children, even when other stressful life events were taken into account. There was also a difference in child reports of their own well-being as measured by self-concept between groups at Wave 1, though this was not observed at Wave 2.

Compounding these difficulties, PI was associated with additional disadvantage at age 9 to children’s self-concept. While at age 9 children reported significantly higher behavioural issues, these difficulties had disappeared by age 13, potentially reflecting a level of resilience among this population. Fergusson and colleagues (2005) emphasise that early behavioural issues (ages 7-9) can increase the risk for later difficulties such as antisocial personality disorder and crime in early adulthood. These effects are particularly relevant for children who have exposure to early psychosocial adversity such as parental incarceration (Rutter et al., 2005).

PCG’s reported more difficulties where their children had experienced PI when compared to the general population in both waves of the study. Even after accounting for other stressful life events, PI was significantly associated with total difficulties at age 9 and again four years later at age 13. Mirroring the reduced behavioural adjustment reported by the child, PCG’s indicated their 9 year old children had peer related difficulties. Additionally, PCG’s reported elevated emotional difficulties in children at age 13. Previous research highlights that where these types of difficulties are reported during childhood, future mental health and anti-social issues are likely (Murray & Farrington, 2008; Fergusson et al., 2006; Rutter et al., 2005).

Taken together, these findings are important in the context of understanding the association of PI with children’s psychological adjustment. They also point to the need for intervention measures to support families affected by imprisonment. In tackling
public health concerns surrounding this topic, researchers and policy makers are focusing on PI itself as an opportunity for potential intervention (Eddy et al., 2001). Significant reductions in future mental health difficulties could be achieved by targeting support towards populations, such as those affected by PI, which are at an elevated risk of life stressors (Shonkoff et al., 2012). Efforts in combating negative outcomes for children could include imprisoning fewer parents whilst developing alternative corrective measures such as tagging or community service (Murray & Farrington, 2008). However, difficulties both practical and political (Tonry, 2004) would restrict this being an immediate or feasible solution. In lieu of such policies, the possibilities of creating programmes which support families during and following PI (Poehlmann, 2010) should be considered. This would be particularly relevant for parents who are facing ongoing challenging child behaviour.

Several limitations apply to this study; firstly there was a small sample size of PCGs who indicated that the study child had experienced PI. In 2017, the imprisonment rate in Ireland was 79 per 100,000 with a total prison population of 3,793 (Irish Prison Service, 2017). While there is no national data on the number of children affected by PI in Ireland, the figure of 1% of the population estimated from this study is in line with the population estimates of imprisonment for Ireland (IPRT, 2017). While there are no official figures relating to the number of inmates who are parents, a recent survey of visits received by prisoners estimated that between 6,865 and 8,283 children are affected by PI in Ireland on any given day (IPRT, 2017). This may account for between 0.7% - 0.8% of the total child population in Ireland (Dunne et al., 2007). This figure is also comparable with international levels. For example, in the U.S., where rates of imprisonment are known to be higher, 2.3% of those under the age of 18 have been affected by PI (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008).
Secondly, there are issues inherent in using secondary data particularly in the context of incarceration (Ahalt et al., 2011). To begin with, recruiting and retaining families impacted by incarceration is difficult (Arditti, 2015). This is reflected in the increased weights applied to children affected. The greater the weight the less representative the population in the dataset (GUI, 2011). Additionally, there was a reduced response rate at wave 2 (76% as opposed to 87% for the general population). Compounding this issue, analysis is limited by the measurement and availability of relevant variables. Incarceration levels were only measured through a one item dichotomous variable, with no additional information on the nature of the incarceration, such as number of incarceration episodes, duration and timing of parental incarceration as well as the gender of the incarcerated parent. Finally, this study controlled for a number of variables including socio-economic factors as well as life events, though the relationship between PI and other variables such as social disadvantage and life events stress, is likely to be complex. Consequently, it is impossible to discern whether difficulties could be attributed to criminal and antisocial behaviour prior to the incarceration. Equally, it is problematic to categorise the difficulties faced by these families are causes or consequences of the incarceration itself (Murray & Farrington, 2008).

In spite of the challenges outlined above, population cohort studies such as GUI provide a unique opportunity not only to access data relating to this hard to reach population but also to follow them across time points, control for potential confounds and compare their experiences with the general population of children. The GUI study is one of the few national cohort studies which follows this population across such an extended period of time, highlighting the long term effects of any level of PI on a child’s development in a hitherto unstudied context. National cohort studies are essential in
analysing international differences in the effect of PI, as this relationship is seen to differ across different national contexts (Murray et al., 2014). Finally, a particularly useful aspect of the current study was that psychological well-being levels were reported by the child themselves rather than a proxy report.

Future studies should focus on following families across time points through national cohort studies, assessing how PI affects children at different developmental stages and time of incarceration. Additionally, research should look to explore how potential supports for the care-givers impact on outcomes for children of incarcerated parents. In conclusion, drawing on data from the first two waves of a population representative cohort study, we identified the association of PI on the emotional and behavioural difficulties of these children over time, over and above the additional socio-economic and stressful life events experienced by these families.
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Chapter Four

Shared experiences and the social cure in the context of a stigmatised identity

A version of this manuscript is published in The British Journal of Social Psychology
Abstract

In an attempt to combat the social isolation and stigma associated with the incarceration of a family member increasingly efforts are made to support families affected by imprisonment. Many of these supports are delivered in group formats. Participation in support groups accrue benefits, sometimes referred to as the social cure, by enhancing a sense of belonging, social connection and subjective identification with the group. Where an identity is stigmatised, subjective group identification may be resisted with the knock on potential to undermine the effectiveness of group-based support. We used semi-structured interviews with 12 partners of incarcerated men participating in a group based support, to explore their identity constructions as well as their perceptions of the value of the support group. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using a discursive analytic approach. Findings emphasise the importance of shared experiences as a basis for connection with others in this context where subjective identification with an identity is problematic. Three themes are documented in the data that emphasise shared experience. These themes Social Isolation, Identification and Happenstance, all orient to the role of shared experience in participants’ talk. The theoretical discussion of these findings highlights the important role of shared experience as a basis for social connections for those affected by stigma. The implications of these findings for supporting families affected by the incarceration and group based approaches to those affected by stigma more generally is also discussed.

Keywords: discursive psychology; incarceration; social cure; social identity; stigma; social isolation
Introduction

The growth in the prison population worldwide and the increasing acknowledgment that families often serve second sentences alongside offenders, has given rise to a growing number of initiatives intended to support families affected by imprisonment (Loper & Turek, 2006; Miller et al., 2013). Many of these initiatives are group based (See Bradshaw & Muldoon, 2017 for an example). At the same time as these developments, a body of evidence in social psychology has demonstrated the value of group membership as a means of supporting health, a phenomenon referred to as the social cure (Haslam, Jetten, Postmes & Haslam, 2009). Many of the benefits of group membership are believed to be driven by subjective identification and as such it can be thought of an active element of the social cure process (Cruwys & Gunaseelan, 2016). Importantly however, available evidence suggests that, in stigmatised situations, subjective identification with an identity or group is actively resisted (Jetten, Iyer, Branscombe & Jang, 2013). Consequently, the value of group based support in stigmatised contexts (such as incarceration of a family member) is less clear but is likely to involve identity negotiation. In this paper we explore, using a discursive approach, the positive and negative identity dynamics associated with participation in a group-based support for partners of incarcerated men.

Group Based Support, Imprisonment & Stigma

Recent decades have witnessed an expansive growth in prison population (Wildeman, 2010) estimated to be over 11 million people worldwide (International Centre for Prison Studies, 2013). The unforeseen consequence of this rise is that families are often inadvertent and forgotten victims of crime and punishment (Mathews, 1983). To date, research and policy has focused on the impact of imprisonment on children, with
little attention given to the experiences of other family members such as the wives and partners of those incarcerated (Miller et al., 2013; Chui, 2016; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2011; Engstrom, 2008; Hoffmann, Byrd, & Kichtlinger, 2010). Incarceration of a family member is stigmatising (Aaron & Dallaire, 2010; Dallaire, 2007; Phillips & Gates, 2011). Incarceration tends to be viewed extremely negatively as it is often understood as ‘self-inflicted’ or a result of a ‘moral failing’. So despite the limited research on the impact of incarceration on family members (Chui, 2016), Nesmith and Ruhland (2011), emphasise how associative and anticipated stigma can be detrimental to both family functioning and well-being. These findings are in line with Goffman’s original position that (1963) described how discrimination and prejudice harms not only the individual with the stigmatised identity, but also extends to their family and associates. For example, family members of people with mental illness reported experiences of shame and culpability as well as strained and distant relationships with others (Öestman & Kjellin, 2002; Corrigan & Miller, 2004). Corrigan and colleagues (2006) also found that families of those with an anti-social behaviour identity, such as drug addiction, faced an increased risk of being blamed and socially shunned. These findings are particularly relevant in the present context. Awareness of the stigma surrounding incarceration can deter family members from help and support seeking resulting in their withdrawing from opportunities for social interactions where they feel their stigmatised identity is emphasised (Schomerus et al., 2012; Quinn & Earnshaw, 2011; Moore & Tangney, 2017). Group based supports may present challenges for family members affected by imprisonment because of the essentially social nature of their stigma.

The benefits of group participation are thought to be delivered through enhanced identity resources. By subjectively identifying with a group we gain access to resources such as support and connection to others thereby enhancing well-being (Cruwys &
Gunaseelan, 2016). Indeed, it is our sense of belonging to affiliative identities, such as family and friendship groups, that makes social support possible (Walsh, Muldoon, Gallagher & Fortune, 2015). One way in which a sense of connection and identification may become available is through a sense of shared experiences (Bastian, Jetten, Thai, & Steffens, 2018). In exploring situations of mass emergency, Drury and colleagues (2009; 2015) argue that the resources associated with the social cure such as solidarity and social support can be accessed through shared experience, even in the absence of prior subjective identification with the group. Kearns and colleagues (2017) also showed that associating and identifying with others on the basis of shared experiences enhances well-being among those dealing with bereavement by suicide. Knight and colleagues (2015) maintain that negative experiences have the particular potential to distinguish between those that have and have not faced a common threat (Knight & Eisencraft, 2015). And available research suggests commonalities in partners lived experiences as a result of a family member’s imprisonment (Boswell et al, 2011). What is not clear is whether identification can develop where resistance to identification and social isolation is high.

Though the basis of the social cure, social identities can also carry a negative physical, psychological, or social cost (McNamara, Stevenson, & Muldoon, 2013). Being a member of a stigmatised group can increase the likelihood of enduring negative experiences, discrimination and prejudice and undermine positive health and well-being (Branscombe, Fernandez, Gomez & Cronin, 2011; Muldoon et al, 2017). In these instances, the value of the identity as a psychological resource and its role as a social cure is undermined. One potential way in which people may deal with stigma is to draw on alternate, non-stigmatised, identities to support their sense of self and wellbeing where they face life challenges. In this way, being a member of multiple groups can give access to a range of beneficial resources (Walter, Jetten, Dingle & Johnstone, 2015; Iyer, Jetten,
Tsivrikos, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009). More recently, evidence has suggested that some identities can be seen as ‘gateway identities’ that facilitate the acquisition of new group membership’s identities and experiences (Kearns, Muldoon, Msetfi, & Surgenor, 2015).

Importantly identities are not static aspects of our inner selves. And negotiating and managing stigmatised identities involves trade-offs between positive and negative identity resources (Branscombe et al., 2011). Importantly, identity categories and constructions are not merely neutral descriptions but rather ways in which to organise the social world and can be seen to have strategic social and political functions (Stevenson & Muldoon, 2010; Varjonen, Arnold & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2013). For example, Barnes (2000) illustrate how discourse constructing members of the Travelling community in southern England as transients is used to normalise a settled lifestyle and to justify practices of surveillance, control and exclusion of Travellers (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000).

It would appear that discourse is a useful window into identity enactment and construction, where what it means to be a member of a particular group is negotiated and managed. In this way, social identities can be understood to be organic and evolving constructions, created and recreated through everyday social interactions and experiences (Wiggins, 2013)

In this way, discourse can also be used to contest negative group connotations. When exploring self-definition among members of the stigmatised Mapuche identity in Chile, Merino & Tileagā (2011) found that young Mapuches used their discourse to negotiate, self-ascribe and resist dominant formations of Mapuche identity. One of the ways in which groups manage stigma is by actively resisting the application of the identity label. Prior (2012) outlines how, when attempting to access individual based counselling supports, students strategically resisted positioning themselves within a potentially stigmatising discourse of mental health. Similarly, Walter and colleagues
(2015) demonstrated that despite meeting an objective definition of homelessness, some individuals rejected the categorisation of homeless instead making downward comparisons to others in subjectively worse situations in order to avoid self-categorisation. Kellezi & Reicher (2012), coined the term ‘social curse’ to refer to the costs of these type of identity processes to cope with a stigmatised identity, individuals can dis-identify in order to protect their sense of self by avoiding the stigmatised identity altogether (Branscombe et al., 2011).

Quin and Earnshaw (2013) emphasise that a stigmatised identity can be seen as a mark of failure or shame for those affected, experienced as something that devalues the self in the eyes of others and therefore is constructed as something to be hidden. By keeping ones true “self” hidden individuals may avoid stigma and discrimination (Hornsey & Jetten, 2011). This is particularly likely in the context where the stigmatised identity is concealable or perceived to be temporary (O’Donnell, O’Carroll, & Toole, 2018). Constructing a stigmatising characteristic as temporary and episodic also enables the individual to distance themselves from the application of the identity label and protect their sense of self (Prior, 2012; Walter et al., 2015). However, concealing a stigmatised identity has a cost (Ellemers & Barreto, 2006). Those who concealed their identity accept and assume the associated stigma. They self-stigmatise and implicitly accept and legitimise the system which is devaluing them (Ellemers & Barreto, 2006). This in turn maintains asymmetries of power where the individual is vulnerable to and accepting of judgment by others (Fiske & Dépret, 1996). Such negative self-stigmatisation can also undermine any sense of belonging and connection to others and (Walsh et al., 2015) may undermine access to similar others and with it restrict access to positive group-based resources (Quinn & Earnshaw, 2013).
Orientating toward the constructed nature of identity, the current study explores how partners of incarcerated men talk and construct their identities. Our approach here is informed by a discourse analysis approach, seeking to understand how problematic identities are managed. We explore whether in a situation where there may be minimal subjective identification and active resistance to a label such as ‘prisoners’ wives whether there is a basis for social cure processes. Equally, we are interested in how this stigmatised identity can at the same time act as a social curse in participants’ efforts to challenge any negative treatment. These identity constructions are central to women’s experience because they impact on their own interactions, justify their behaviours and attitudes in this context and reflect women’s views on their positioning by others. Rather than comparing groups of women, our main aim then, is to explore the identity construction and management of partners of incarcerated men invited to participate in a group-based support, and the potential value of group based supports to these women in a context where the identity may be actively resisted.

Method

Participants

The [NAME] Prison service was involved in a national initiative to pilot the delivery of supports to families of incarcerated men aimed at facilitating meaningful relationships between imprisoned men and their families on the outside. As a consequence, group based support was offered to prisoners’ partners who were, as a result of the incarceration, managing young children alone. The support group was put in place via a partnership between the prison and a local community based organisation working to support offenders and their families. The support group met once a week at a community centre, facilitated by two support workers. These two female support worker
had experience of a family member being incarcerated previously and had worked to support families affected by imprisonment on a voluntary basis since that time. For a period of 8 weeks, the same group of women met to offer each other support. Conversation within the group focused on difficulties the women may be having surrounding personal, parenting or family issues. This study approached and interviewed all of the women \( (N = 12) \), who participated in this group-based support. Reflecting the prison population in Ireland, participants were drawn from the most social deprived areas of the region the prison served and were all White.

**Recruitment and Interviewing**

Reflecting the very many difficulties of working with prisoners and their families, the roll out and recruitment of women to the study was challenging. The relationship between the prison, which was seen to have a punitive orientation, and the community organisation which saw itself as having a welfare orientation was at times very fraught. The support group was set up in conjunction with an initiative driven by the prison and as a result the involvement of the research team, introduced by the prison was viewed with suspicion. Much effort was put into reassuring the community organisation who were suspicious and fearful of both the researchers and the research process. Similarly, the recruitment of the women to the study was challenging. Reflective of position vis-à-vis the state and its agencies, many were concerned about the impact of their participation on unrelated issues such as welfare payments or child custody arrangements. This high level of mistrust and a reluctance to engage with the research process meant that considerable work was invested in educating gatekeepers of the function and feasibility of the project. Throughout the process, the independence of the project from welfare and penal institutions was emphasised.
Having negotiated access, researchers were introduced to potential participates during the first session of the support group. Having gained access to the population, the first author outlined the research project and issued an invitation to participate in the study. High levels of suspicion and mistrust of outside agencies and potential authority figures were encountered. Women were particularly sensitive to any suggestion that the research process was an evaluation of them and again considerable effort was expended in informing women that it was the group based approach that was of interest. Once the first woman agreed to participate and that interview was perceived by the participant to have gone well, others agreed based on her report. Participants were interviewed in their own homes by the first author accompanied by a research assistant who was local, white and female. Interviews were conducted by the first author who was a white male. Both researchers were likely perceived as middle class due to their accents and association with the University.

All interviews were semi-structured, recorded and transcribed verbatim. A research schedule was developed covering three core areas of: the perceptions of the support group, (e.g. “How did you get on during the group?”); their relationship with their partner (Has your relationship with your partner changed in any way?”), and; Where do we go from here? (e.g. “What do you think should happen next, now that the meetings have finished?”). In an effort to create a neutral and open environment, a conversational tone was used throughout the interview. Consequently, the research schedule served only as a loose structure with discussion being guided by the participant answers.

In order to protect the anonymity of the participants all names were changed in the transcripts and pseudonyms are used throughout this paper. Ethical approval was obtained from both the University of Limerick and the Irish Prison Service Ethical Review Boards. When the purpose of the study was explained to the participants it was
also emphasised that non-participation on the study did not restrict families from their continued engagement with the would not result in any prison based incentives for their partners, such as preferential treatment during parole board or disciplinary hearings, additional or enhanced visits, access to temporary release schemes, or transfers to open prison sites.

**Analysis**

Analysis was conducted using a discursive analytical approach (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Potter, 1996), specifically a thematic discourse analysis (Taylor & Ussher, 2001). Recordings were initially listened to with and without transcripts by the first author in order to gain an understanding of the overall dataset. Guided by a social identity approach and taking an inclusive approach, all references to identity construction were selected, extracted and saved in a separated document (MacNaghten, 1993; Willig, 2013). As such the analysis can be considered to be a systematic thematic analysis followed by a discourse analysis (Naughton, Muldoon & O’Donnell, 2018; Taylor & Ussher, 2001). So for example “It’s just been hectic, and every Thursday I used to go in and we’d just get our worries off”, would be selected as it moves from a singular to a plural description emphasising the participant’s sense of being in a wider collective. This resulted in forty-six excerpts being identified which were reviewed by DB and OM. These 46 excerpts were then coded with labels remaining close to the data. Commonalities between labels were identified and amalgamated to form higher order themes. Throughout this process the two authors discussed potential themes resulting in the final three themes documented here. Excerpts were then analysed using principles derived from discursive psychology (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Potter, 1996). Specifically, excerpts that exemplified each theme were subjected to further discursive
analysis so that the management and negotiation of identity in the women’s talk was exposed (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998).

Findings

Three distinct themes relating to the experiences of women whose partners are incarcerated were identified. Our analysis identified how participants used perceptions of their experiences as a criterion for constructing inclusion in the support group context and exclusion in other social contexts. The peculiarity associated with the experience of being a prisoners’ partner was used to normalise and justify their own and others behaviour but equally the unusual situation was used to externalise perceived stigma. The three themes were entitled: 1. Social isolation, ‘People like myself (don’t) go and look for other company’, 2. Identification with the new group, ‘We could speak about things [...] we are not the only ones’. 3. Happenstance, ‘When you are in a situation’.

Theme one: Social isolation; ‘People like myself (don’t) go and look for other company’,

Participants emphasised that they had an expectation of judgment which hindered their speaking about their situation. This also prevented them from seeking help from their existing social circle when it was needed. Their talk indicated that this was in part based on a reluctance to speak with those who had not experienced the situation. In extract one, Sheila offers an explanation justifying her lack of help seeking behaviour as normative for ‘people like her’.

Extract One. Sheila
1 Interviewer Would you recommend the course to someone else?
2 Sheila Oh definitely, yeah, I really would.
3 Just to be around other people in the same situation as you
4 [...] People like myself (don’t) go and look for other company
5 or go for help, just to even talk
6 I don’t think, like I never, ever went to look for it
Sheila described the group based nature of ‘the course’ rather than any aspect of the content; “Just to be around other people in the same situation”. Sheila then continues by describing the importance of being with those with similar experience. Using the phrase “People like myself”, Sheila differentiates and distances herself from others without this experience with the phrase, “other company”. In doing so, Sheila offers a subject position (Davies & Harre, 1990) whereby she constructs and positions herself within a specific identity. In doing so, she is more likely to be influenced and constrained by what she views as stereotypical behaviour (Joyce, Stevenson & Muldoon 2013). In line 1-2 Sheila describes what the perceived stereotypical attributes and behaviours of those affected by imprisonment are. Using a three part list, Sheila focuses specifically on the lack of help-seeking behaviours, not looking for “company”, “help”, or opportunities to “talk”. Sheila also invokes extreme case formation as she describes her reluctance to access even minimal help in line 2, “just to even talk”. In this way, Sheila is articulating a perceived norm that it is not appropriate for prisoners’ partners seeking help from others (Pomerantz, 1986). Finally, in Line three, Sheila emphases how her behaviours are consistent with the norms and behaviour, this time accentuating the certainty with which she feels she would not have sought help in the past; “I never, ever went to look for (support)”. In short, Sheila accepts, normalises and legitimises her own behaviour exclusion and silence.

Similarly in extract two, Norah also differentiates between those who have been in a situation where their partner has been imprisoned and those who have not by virtue of their circumstances. She also elaborates on how a fear of judgement from others who don’t share her experience means she is reluctant to speak.

Extract two, Norah
1 Norah Like towards another person now like
In lines 2-3, Norah invokes a hypothetical interaction with an anonymous other. Using the phrase “Someone around that was never in that situation”, Norah establishes two things. Firstly, in line 2, using the phrase “someone around” Norah established that the interlocutor is readily accessible and close to hand. In this way Norah emphasises the likelihood of this conversation. Secondly in line 3, Norah emphasises the differences between herself and the unnamed other, because of the lack of shared experiences between someone “that was never in that situation” compared with someone who has. Norah is using her own situation of having an incarcerated partner, as a key point of difference between her and hypothetical others. This lack of experience is subsequently used in lines 4-5 to explain how social contact with others was characterised by fear as well as a self-imposed censorship; “you would be scared to say somethings”. In Line 5 Norah elaborates how the self-censorship is a shield from a potential judgement of undefined others; “in case they kind of judge you”. In lines 3-4 we also see that Norah moves “I” to “you”, thereby offering a reaction that she assumes is uncontentious. In creating an imagined scenario, Norah recruits the listener or interviewer to become a co-creator of the content and its meaning (Baumer et al., 2011). Consequently, the credibility of the message as well as the connection between the speaker and listener is enhanced (Nilsson & Carlsson, 2014; Sakki & Pettersson, 2015) and Norah’s common sense presentation of her guardedness and expectation of being judged is presented as a normal and justifiable.
Finally, in extract three, similar to previous extracts, the experience of an incarcerated partner appears to hinder help-seeking behaviour in this case even from traditional affiliative supports such as family and friends:

Extract three. Mary

Interviewer Would you have talked to anybody, like your friends and family?

Mary No. I don’t know. I’m trying to think.

None of my friend’s partners are locked up. [...] No I didn’t.

I just hope that (my Partner) does get straight

Mary answers the question about available supports with a straightforward ‘no’, but then, Mary’s attempts to qualify her answer with some indecision; “No. I don’t know. I’m trying to think”. This hesitancy is resolved by stating that no one else shares her experience; “None of my friend’s partners are locked up”. The fact that none of her friends’ partners are locked up is offered as a relevant and sufficient justification for not drawing on these networks. In doing so, Mary legitimises her social isolation and social dis-connection and also accepts her hopefully temporary social exclusion. Mary’s emphasis on the potential temporary nature of this dilemma is marked by a lack of agency. Control over her reconnection with her social circle and supports is very much aspirational and seen as defined by the actions of her partner (See line 4); “I just hope that (my partner) goes straight”.

Theme Two: Positive outcomes through identification with the new group; “we could speak about things [...] we are not the only ones”

Theme two captures how participants constructed a sense of ‘group’ with other women in their support group. Importantly, the fact that the participants’ partners were incarcerated was not the basis of this inclusion, rather, participants emphasised the importance of their shared experiences. In extract four, Mary describes the process by which she has come to
identify with the support group as well as outlining the perceived benefits she has accrued from identification with this group.

**Extract four. Mary**

1. Mary  
   Because we were all in the same situation, like,
2. (Name) understood me, I understood her,
3. it was like we were going through the same thing, […]
4. so we all kind of bonded together
5. because it wasn’t like she is over there, she is after living a
6. great life with her fella,
7. like we were all in the same situation

In this extract, Mary moves between singular and plural pronouns changing the emphasis to reflect either group identification or exclusion. For example, in line 2-3, Mary goes from using singular pronouns such as “I”, “me” and “her,” toward using the plural “we” indicating the a move from individual to a more collective identity. Specifically for Mary, the degree to which she felt understood by other group members was explained by the degree to which she felt they were in similar situation; “Because we were all in the same situation, like, (Name) understood me, I understood her,”. While for Sheila and Norah, a lack of a shared experience was a barrier to social connection in the wider world, for Mary a shared experience was the basis for a reciprocal and shared social connection to others in the support group; “we were going through the same thing, […] so we kind of bonded together”.

Mary reiterates in lines 5-7 her belief that benefits accrued are a consequence of their shared situation. In describing those excluded from the support group, Mary returns to using singular pronouns; “She” and “her” while at the same time emphasising criteria for inclusion; like we were all in the same situation”.
In extract five below, Jane talks about the sense of inclusion arising from perceived shared experiences with those in the support group. Jane also speaks about the positive outcomes she experienced arising from this sense of belonging.

Extract five. Jane
1  Jane You don’t feel like you are the odd one out then.
2  I feel like you get along with everyone else kind of more
3  because we are all in the same situation anyway [...]
4  so I find it very good. Yeah,
5  it is comforting, you feel like less stress when you leave the place.”

Again we see Jane’s use of pronouns in lines 1-4, emphasises a transition from individual to group identity going from “I” to “we”. In line 2, Jane describes her sense of belonging, specifically how she felt connected with other participants; “I feel like you get along with everyone”, and attributes this connection to their shared experiences; “because we are all in the same situation.” Drawing on their shared circumstances, Jane uses a three-part list to illustrate the perceived benefits she attributes to the shared situations being “good”, “comforting” and feeling “less stress”.

Finally, in extract six Susan supports previous comments and emphasises how shared experiences facilitated participant’s openness and social connection.

Extract six. Susan
1  Susan I think it actually brought a lot of us closer together like,
2  knowing that people are in the same situations
3  [...]
4  we are able to get things off our chests
5  [...]
6  we could speak about things.
7  and we are not the only ones that are like going through the same things

Echoing previous extracts, Susan uses the collective pronouns “us” and “we” in lines 1, 4, 6 & 7, reflecting her feelings of inclusion in the group. In contrast to Extract 2, where Susan reported social interaction characterised by fear and self-censorship, Susan emphasises in lines 4 & 6 an ability to share and speak openly and in an unguarded
fashion; “we are able to get things off our chest [...] we could speak about things”.

Additionally, by using phrases such as “we are able” and “we can”, Susan reflects a shared sense of agency. Susan claims this openness and that agency arises from their shared experiences not only provides participants with a safe space to speak but also facilitates a sense of belonging and social connection between group members. This is illustrated in lines 1-2; “I think it actually brought a lot of us closer together like, knowing that people are in the same situations”, and again in line 7; “we are not the only ones”. Lastly, Susan alludes to a sense of common fate amongst group members who not only experienced similar situations in the past but are experiencing similar experience on an ongoing basis as they are currently “going through the same things”.

Finally in extract seven, Sheila describes how participation with the group provided her with opportunities to engage in new experiences and activities free from judgment.

Extract seven. Sheila
1 Sheila it was a great group [...] just (to) get out of the house even [...]
2 and then you’re in town, so you could always walk up for coffee
3 with them or, the other day now the other girls were gone up town, just stroll up town and having a chat after, you know,
4 just something with other people that’s not judging you

Sheila begins by presenting the group as a catalyst for more frequent social interaction. Initially this is described in terms of logistics and opportunity. Participating with the group provided her with a reason for leaving the house and as she was in town anyway she was afforded more opportunity to engage in seemingly innocuous activities such as going for a “stroll” (see line 4), or “walking up for a coffee.” By prefacing with adverbs; “even” (see line 1) or “just” (see lines 1, 4 & 5) Sheila presents each of these activities as everyday activities that can now be enjoyed. By not specifying the exact details of the
event, Sheila creates an image of an easily and frequently availed of social opportunity. Having established the opportunity and legitimacy of the behaviour, Sheila highlights that an integral facilitator of each activity is the lack of judgment (see line 5) “just something with other people that’s not judging you.” This implies that for Sheila, ordinary daily interactions can be fraught with feelings of being positioned and judged by others which undermine her social engagement but are countered by participation with the group.

Theme three, Happenstance: ‘When you are in a situation’

This theme captures how participants spoke about their experiences as external to their definition of themselves, an external feature of their lives rather than an internalised element of their own identity. As such, participants resisted self-categorisation as “prisoners’ partners”. In doing so, participants can distance themselves from the negative connotations, stigma and guilt of being in a relationship with an incarcerated man.

As noted earlier, participants refer to a ‘situation’ when speaking about how they have experienced life since their partner was imprisoned as is the case in extract eight below:

Extract eight. Sheila

1 Sheila Then when you are in a situation (others) don’t, I suppose stop
2 and think of what I’m going through.

What is striking about the reference to ‘a situation’ is its appearance across the other extracts (See also Extract 1, line 3; Extract 2, line 3; Extract 3, line 1; Extract 4, line 3; Extract 5, line 2). Though experience of this situation is identified as a sufficient and necessary element in accessing group membership and associated support (See extract 2, line 3), participants appear unwilling to elaborate on what the ‘situation’ is, but at the same time expect a universal understanding as to its content. By not naming the specifics
of ‘the situation’ two things are being achieved. First, by using a broad universal descriptor, participants emphasise the totality of their experiences rather than a specific element. Second, by not naming the ‘situation’ they appear to be engaging in a discursive repression (Wigginton & LaFrance, 2016) whereby a spoiled aspect of their identity is avoided. Reflecting this, participants often refer to ‘that or ‘the’ situation, emphasising the external, separate and independent feature rather than an internalised aspect of themselves (See also Extract 1, line 3; Extract 2, line 3; Extract 4, line 1; Extract 5, line 3; Extract 6, line 2). In this way, participants both resist the label and recognise their inability to manage such a powerfully negative identity preferring to reference the ‘situation’.

An exceptional case is Mary’s direct reference to having a partner in prison (extract 9). In Extract nine, Mary elaborates on how despite this resistance to self-categorisation, preferring to reference the ‘situation’, she recognises that the group structure and associated support was facilitated by the prison.

Extract nine. Mary
1 Interviewer Are you glad you did (sign up for the supports)?
2 Mary Yes.
3 [.....]
4 Mary Like [Name] and [Name], we are on Facebook, and we would chat away on Facebook and stuff.
5 Interviewer [.....] are (you) going to keep up the contacts later?
6 Mary That is yeah, at least you know now that there are other people out there that are in the exact same situation as you, so probably like (it is) the best part of the jail up there.

Mary explicitly refers to ‘the situation’ (see lines 8-9) as the route through which connections are made with other similar others. Yet, referring to the negative experiences involved in ‘the situation’ as a potential positive can be problematic. In prefacing the comment with the word ‘probably’ Mary is limiting the extent to which the statement can
be undermined (Willig, 2013, Potter 1997): “so probably like (it is) the best part of the jail up there”. In doing so, Mary is acknowledging the positive of drawing on the situation as a resource but at the same time insulating herself against contradiction of a potential dilemma where having ‘the best part of the jail’ might make her sound like imprisonment is desirable (Billig et al., 1988). Her acknowledgement of the value of the group for women who would prefer not to need this support is a very good representation of the reality of the situation for these women.

Discussion

Using a discursive analysis approach, this paper explored the identity constructions of partners of incarcerated men who had engaged with group based supports as well as the value of these supports to women negotiating a highly stigmatised identity. Our analysis identified a strong sense of social isolation and exclusion which women presented as justifiable. There was no sense in which women railed at their exclusion and disconnection from others. Rather, it was presented as a part of the experience of being a partner and co-parent of an imprisoned man. This experience of social stigma and isolation was an experience women felt they shared with others participating in a support group. This sense of shared experience amongst women in the support group allowed them to form connections with others. It also allowed women to resist or suppress the highly stigmatised attributes and labels applied to prisoners’ families. Women defined their situation or circumstances as the issue rather than defining any element of themselves or their identity as problematic. Findings also have practical and policy implications and can guide researchers in recruiting and supporting stigmatised and hard to reach populations.
Our findings add to previous research, which has suggested that subjective identification with a group enables a social cure via a sense of belonging, meaning and social connection (Cruwys & Gunaseelan, 2016). Though this process is undermined when a group identity is perceived to be tainted with a stigma (Branscombe et al., 2011), our findings suggest that shared experience can be an important vehicle for the development of social connections and identity resources in these more problematic contexts. Our evidence suggests the membership of a stigmatised group involves trade-offs. Some dimensions of the identity are detrimental to individuals affected (Kellezi & Reicher, 2012). Paradoxically, we also found evidence that group based support for those affected by stigma can actually counter this stigma even in the absence of subjective identification with the stigmatised group. A sense of shared experience with others affected by the stigma is central to the success of these group supports.

Results also indicate how participants constructed a sense of group with other women by orienting towards their shared experiences. For the participants, it was not enough that others had their partners incarcerated, instead the group sense of identity evolved out of perception of common adversity arising from those experiences. This reflects previous research which emphasises how shared experiences can facilitate interpersonal and group bonding (Koudenburg, Postmes, Gordijn, & Van Mourik Broekman, 2015). Negative experiences specifically, can act as a demarcation emphasising the distinction between those facing a common threat and those who do not (Knight & Eisencraft, 2015). Sharing such adverse experiences can enable group support and connection (Bastian, Jetten, Thai, & Steffens, 2018). This has been exemplified in research on crowds and natural disasters (Drury et al., 2009; 2015). The current study expands on this by demonstrating how shared experiences of adversity in the context of a
stigmatised identity can still be the basis through which a shared sense of identity can develop.

Our participants made the distinction between themselves and those who did not have similar experiences. In doing so participants reported that they often isolated and segregated themselves from others and were disinclined to seek help. Klein and colleagues (2007) argue that social identity performance can be understood to be either the expression or the suppression of behaviours. Our data would appear to suggest that women affected by imprisonment of partners and co-parents actively suppress social engagement with others anticipating sanction or disapproval from others. In doing so participants accepted, legitimised and reified their own and their children’s punishment for crimes they did not commit. This demonstrates the extent to which the social stigma, including self-stigma, applied to those affected by imprisonment remains acceptable and unchecked. It also reflects the very real challenges of working to support and enable these very vulnerable families, routinely positioned as undeserving by themselves and others.

Wigginton and LaFrance (2016) describe how individuals can engage in a discursive repression where aspects of identity can be hidden. In this way individuals can avoid a revealing spoiled elements of their identity. Similarly in the context of prejudicial views of a racial out-group, Durrheim and colleagues (2015) emphasise that individuals actively manage their social identity by speaking indirectly about potentially problematic aspects. The current study elaborates on this approach using a stigmatised identity, illustrating how a problematic and potentially stigmatising aspect of identity can be managed. By referring to their current experiences as a ‘situation’ rather than an integral part of how they see themselves, participants were able to keep a stigmatising identity at arms-length. Consequently, the stigmatised identity is suppressed, the stigma resisted
with participants constructing ‘the situation’ as an external element rather than an internalised as part of their identity.

These findings also have implications for public and social policy. If stigma generates a reluctance to identify with the group, then support groups initiatives built on characteristics of that stigma are likely to encounter recruitment difficulties. Previous research highlights how multiple social groups’ can enhance the benefits of the social cure by providing alternative avenues for support. Here there is an important role for compatible (Iyer et al., 2009) and gateway identities (Kearns, Muldoon, Msetfi & Surgenor, 2018). A gateway identity is where identification with one social group can lead to the acquisition of another facilitating increased perception of social support and reducing perceived stigma (Kearns et al., 2018). Similarly, the current findings indicate that while participants were unwilling to name or identify with a stigmatised identity they were willing to engage with the support group on the basis of shared experiences of a difficult situation. In the current example, we can see how even a very negative and stigmatised identity was used as a gateway identity, or base, from which to build a group identity based on shared experience. By orientating towards gateway identities, support groups can activate the benefits of the social cure to facilitate further support. This means that support can be offered to stigmatised groups without alienating or excluding them. It is important however for practitioners to think about the most appropriate and appealing ways to target stigmatised and hard to reach populations for group based interventions, given that resistance to stigmatised identities are unlikely to have the necessary traction.
When reflecting on the results of this study it is important to consider a number of limitations. Access to the participants was only achieved after considerable effort on the part of the researchers, negotiating with a number of reluctant and at times sceptical gatekeepers. This, along with the sensitive nature of the questions, as well as the vulnerable position of the women involved in this study may have contributed to women adopting a guarded stance (Arditti, 2015; Schomerus et al., 2012). While every effort was made to establish trust and rapport, this dynamic is likely to have affected the interviews. This group represents a very vulnerable as well as hard to reach cohort (Arditti, 2015) with a small population and so caution needs to be exercised in generalising findings.

Despite these limitations, this study provides a vital insight into the experiences and behaviour of a traditionally difficult to reach population. Findings contribute both theoretically and practically in supporting some of the most vulnerable and often overlooked members of society. It highlights the importance of shared experience as means of connecting those isolated by stigma. It also highlights psychological protection associated with stigma suppression and resistance whilst at the same time offering insight into which stigma remains a pernicious social problem. Resisting stigmatised identification whilst psychologically protective, is unlikely to empower vulnerable and marginalised people to challenge the legitimacy of their social exclusion.
References


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Chapter Five

General Discussion
General Discussion

Using experiences of parental incarceration in Ireland as a context, the current thesis explored the experiences and of families affected by parental incarceration in a changing Irish prison system. It has added to our understanding of parental incarceration in three ways. First, it highlights, how individuals with potentially contested and stigmatised identity, such as an incarcerated father, strategically used their different identities of prisoner and father in order to construct a positive version of themselves as fathers. Second, it demonstrates the relationship between PI and children’s’ psychological, emotional, and social development in an Irish context. Third, it emphasises the importance of shared experiences as a basis for connection with others in this context where subjective identification with an identity is problematic. This final chapter integrates and discusses overall findings in relation to the practical and theoretical implications and gives an overview of the combined contribution of each individual study. Limitations and directions for future research are discussed.

Practical and Applied implications

These results also have a number of practical implications. While there is a growing number of initiatives aimed at supporting incarcerated men and their families, only by understanding how families are affected can these interventions be effective (Purvis, 2013). Findings of the current thesis will facilitate the IPS to address one of its core values of, developing, and maintaining positive family relationships (Irish Prison Service, 2015). In order to cater for the specific needs of those affected, there have been calls made by the Irish Penal Reform Trust both to increase our understanding of the issues faced by children affected (Donson & Parkes, 2017) as well as to include the voices of families (Martyn, 2012). The current research contributes to this discussion by providing empirical evidence of the experiences and relationship of parental incarceration
on developmental outcomes for families affected. By drawing on these findings policy makers have the opportunity to design and target interventions in such a way as to be relevant, accessible and effective to those in most need.

Findings from the current thesis demonstrate the potential of using a father identity as an anchor from which to support reintegration back into the community. Father identity was demonstrated to be a robust and valued identity for the participants. Participants expressed concern that they would be appraised negatively and endeavoured to undermine such appraisals and emphasise positive elements about their own fathering. While common discourse and legislative measures emphasise the inappropriateness of incarcerated men’s claim to father identity, fathers in the study redefined their experiences and behaviours as positive resources from which they could offer unique and positive contributions to supporting their families and children.

In supporting families affected by incarceration, it is important to understand the challenges that they face. By drawing on reports from both the child and their primary care-giver, the current research can facilitate interventions by highlighting the association of parental incarceration on children’s development. While previous studies report conflicting results, different cultural contexts can have different implications in regards to the stigma attached to the incarceration of a family member (Besemer et al., 2011). The current research draws attention to the difficult contexts these children are developing in as well as identifies how experience of parental incarceration affects their ongoing development. By understanding how these children and their care-givers are affected, we can better target supports where they are needed most. For example, prison based initiatives can be developed which support meaningful and relevant contact between the families and incarcerated parent.
Finally, one of the unique elements of this thesis is the inclusion of the voice of the partners of imprisoned men. By drawing on their shared experiences partners of incarcerated men were able to access the benefits of a social cure. While there are initiatives aimed at supporting families during imprisonment, few orientate towards the needs of the partners of these men (Bradshaw et al., 2019). This is of particular concern as partners of incarcerated men can be affected by a courtesy stigma (Goffman, 1963) where they feel culpable of their partner’s crimes (Boswell et al. 2002). However, individuals possessing a concealable stigmatised identity can be reluctant to engage in activities that emphasise the stigmatised identity (Quinn et al., 2013). This represents a difficulty for interventions that aim to provide relevant supports (Stevenson et al., 2010). By orientating towards gateway identities, support groups can activate the benefits of the social cure by using the pre-proximal group structure to facilitate support. This means that support can be offered to stigmatised groups without alienating or excluding them.

Theoretical implications

Previous research emphasises how self-categorisation can be problematic for individuals in the context of stigmatised or contested identities. The current research builds on our theoretical understanding by illustrating how individuals negotiate and construct their membership of stigmatised and resisted identities as well as demonstrating the association of PI with children’s development. In our first empirical paper, we demonstrate how, in the context of a potentially devalued identity, individuals construct and engage in their identity as fathers. In contrast to previous research which emphasises the obstacles for incarcerated father to claim a father identity (Uggen & McElrath, 2014; Genty, 2012), the current research demonstrates how incarcerated fathers construct fatherhood as an assumed identity. For the participants it was the management of a positive appraisal that was at stake, rather than the justification of the identity claim.
Participants in the study then conducted downward comparisons with other inmates such as heroin addicts, emphasising that there were others more deserving of the negative label. Finally, fathers drew on their previous offending behaviour as areas of personal growth. In doing so, incarcerated fathers in the study positioned themselves in such a way as to minimise the impact of potential negative appraisals and emphasise their individual strengths as fathers through learning from their previous misdemeanours.

In chapter three, we investigated the relationship between PI and children’s development. We address concerns expressed in the literature by identifying the unique effect of parental incarceration on children’s well-being. Previous research has emphasised the need for longitudinal based studies that can account for other factors impacting negative outcomes for children developing in the context of parental incarceration (Johnson & Easterling, 2012). By drawing on a population-based cohort, the current thesis was able to control for confounding factors such as negative life events as well as socio-demographic features. In doing so, this thesis was able to establish the unique effect of parental incarceration, on the development of children.

Findings indicate that children are developing within very challenging circumstances, such as lower economic status with a greater likelihood of experiencing potentially negative life events than children from the general population. Such circumstances leave them at risk of future social and psychological difficulties (McMahon, et al., 2003; Appleyard et al., 2005). A strength of this paper is that it collected data both from primary care-givers but also from the child themselves (Johnson & Easterling, 2012). Previous research emphasises the importance of collecting data from multiple sources (De Los Reyes et al. 2015). In the current thesis, children’s self-report levels of behavioural issues present at age 9 had disappeared by age 13. However, at age 13, care-givers continued to report that they were encountering ongoing
challenging behaviour with regard to the children’s emotional and behavioural
difficulties. However, while results may reflect a level of resilience, early behavioural
issues may also indicate future difficulties in later adulthood (Fergusson et. al., 2005).

Finally, investigating the experiences of partners of those imprisoned and drawing
on a discursive psychological approach, we enhanced our current understanding of the
social identity approach and the social cure by demonstrating that group-based identity
linked to stigma can still develop despite resistance to a stigmatised label. Having a
partner or family member incarcerated represents a time of significant upheaval for a
family concerned. Not least of which is the acquisition of a new stigmatising and
unwanted identity. The temporary and concealable nature of this new identity may result
in individuals hiding aspects of themselves from others in order to escape potential
judgement (Quinn et al., 2013). Reflecting this, findings from paper three indicate that
participants resisted self-categorising within the stigmatised label, instead preferring to
speak about ‘the situation’. In doing so, women affected kept the stigmatised identity at
arm-reach external and separate from how they saw themselves. This finding supports
other research on stigmatised identities such as mental health (Prior, 2009), suicide of a
family member (Kearns et al., 2017). However, in keeping this identity at arms-reach,
individuals are undermining potential avenues of support (Branscombe et al., 1999).
Research surrounding the social cure emphasise the benefits of membership of a social
group in order to access connection and support. In order to access such benefits,
individuals need to self-categorise as members of that group. In the context of a
stigmatised and concealable identity, individuals may instead resist categorising and
thereby avoid negative judgement but also cut off potential supports from group
membership. Such an approach also presents difficulties in any attempts to support
individuals involved. This work supports previous work by Drury and colleagues (2009)
who suggest that access to the social cure was possible by drawing on a sense of shared experience of adversity. The value in the current research is that even in the context of stigma, identity processes can be harnessed for support.

**Project Strengths & Limitations**

There are a number of limitations evident within this thesis, such as the sensitive nature of the topic under discussion during the qualitative interviews as well as small sample size, and lack of control over variables present in the quantitative measures.

To begin with, the sensitive nature of the topic under discussion may have resulted in guarded responses from the participants. Issues of trust pervaded throughout the process. This was initially evident in our attempts to engage with services and gatekeepers but was also a feature in our interactions with participants. As a researcher, I perceived the women as being far more vulnerable during the interviews than their partners. There was an intensity and rawness in these interviews that was absent in my dealings with the men. While there were clearly issues of trust, men requested far more information as to who I was than their partners did, all of the men agreed to participate. However, what was at stake for the men was that they present a positive identity of their own fatherhood. In contrast, their partners were faced with a potentially more stigmatising identity. Partners of incarcerated men can feel guilty by association and complicit in their partners’ crimes, or due to their continued connection with their imprisoned partner (Arditti, 2015; Boswell, 2002). However, the sensitive nature of the topic can also be seen as an advantage, as participants were given opportunity to discuss and recognise difficulties which otherwise may never be recognised in their everyday lives.

While not as intense, issues of trust were still evident in my interviews with incarcerated fathers. For these men, interviews with me may be representative of previous interviews
they had experienced during the judicial process. As such, fathers may interpret the situation as an adversarial one between the accuser and the accused. Additionally, discussing the roles and responsibilities of a father may elicit feelings of guilt in the context of their current incarceration. Questions surrounding parenting beliefs and behaviours can be interpreted as an evaluation of their parenting abilities. Additionally, the perception of outside evaluation in the form of the current research as well as the perceived difference in social grouping between myself and those being interviewed may have resulted in guarded responses from both the fathers and mothers in participating in this study. Taken together, questions surrounding parenting and the current incarceration may resulted in guarded responses from both the incarcerated father and their partners.

Interview data is used in both chapter 2 and chapter 4. When conducting and analysing interview data it is important to recognise the interactive nature of the interview (Potter & Hepburn, 2008). Consequently, it is important to address my own role in both the data collection and analysis. I am a constant feature within the process. What questions I asked as well as how I asked them, will have limited the answering possibilities for the participants and also limit the scope of the enquiry (Hepburn & Potter, 2011). Consequently, results can be understood to be co-constructed through this process. During the interviews, participants were aware that I myself was a father. This may have influenced their responses. Additionally, as an individual, I was coming to the process with my own assumptions about the world. How questions were asked, what responses were followed up and how the analysis was conducted would have been filtered through my own worldview.

Additionally, interview data was collected from participants who were enrolled in a prison-based parenting programme. Consequently, they represent a cohort for whom parenting is important and who are actively trying to maintain their parenting identity.
This may undermine any attempt to generalise to a wider prison population. However, this identity conflict is central to the current thesis. Understanding how fathers and mothers affected by incarceration resolve such identity-based dilemmas is an important element in any prison-based parenting initiative (Purvis, 2013).

Limitations were also evident in regards to the quantitative measures. Firstly, there was a relatively small sample size. Despite the fact that this paper was drawing on a population cohort study, only 50 children were reported to have experienced parental incarceration before the age of nine years of age. However, while this is small when considered to other population based studies, for example the Fragile Families cohort study in the US, this figure represents 1% of the total population and is equivalent to estimates of the total number affected in Ireland (IPRT, 2017).

Second, in using a population cohort study, we were restricted as to what variables were included and how they were measured. For example, the dichotomous nature of the incarceration measure resulted in a limited understanding of the nature of the incarceration. Additionally, we had no measure of identity, perceived stigma or perceived discrimination within the dataset and had to rely on the assumed stigmatised nature of parental incarceration rather than a self-reported one. However, the inclusion of this data allowed us to identify the unique effect of PI on children’s medium term development in a way that qualitative data could not.

In spite of these limitations, this thesis makes important theoretical and practical contributions. Research with this population is largely absent despite a very real need (Martyn, 2012). Reasons behind this absence may reflect a general retributional model of justice (Roberts, 2002), but it also may represent the difficulty in accessing this hard to reach population. Reflecting this difficulty, participants in this study were only accessible
to researcher after a persistent and concerted effort. This was only possible after addressing the needs of both the prison services as well as community agency needs.

**Future Directions**

Future studies should focus on the identity construction of children affected. While this study illustrated quantitatively the effect of PI on children affected, few studies focus on the lived experiences of children involved. Qualitative studies may identify potential mechanisms through which stigma works to undermine positive outcomes for children affected. Additionally studies should continue to follow children in population cohort studies and explore how early contact with parental incarceration affects lifelong social, emotional, educational and psychological development. In following children as they develop, studies can identify mechanisms through which positive and negative outcomes are transmitted.

Finally, studies should focus on how supporting care-givers and families can impact on outcomes for children and their families. Specifically by focusing on existing family support initiatives such as the Family Links in Ireland (Bradshaw & Muldoon, 2017), researchers need to explore how stigma, identity and identity constructions of participants and stakeholders can impact participation and the implementation of parental interventions conducted within a prison context. For example, recognising the importance of supporting family contact during incarceration there are a growing number of interventions aimed at, few papers explore the role of the prison officer charged with implementing such interventions.

**Final summary**

The current research was conducted in a context of change in the Irish Prison system. While changes were directed at supporting families affected by PI, there is a
dearth of research conducted within an Irish context and so we know very little about how families are affected or how we can support them. The current research recruited incarcerated fathers, their partners and children in order to create a more nuanced understanding of parental incarceration in a changing Irish prison system. Guided by an identity-based approach, I demonstrated how incarcerated fathers construct and use their different father and prisoner identities in order to create a positive group sense of self. Following this, I demonstrate the association between PI and the social, psychological and emotional development of children affected. Finally, I demonstrated how, in the context of a stigmatised and resisted identity, self-categorisation can occur and aspects of the social cure can be accessed. In doing so, I establish how support initiatives can target and support partners of incarcerated men (Purvis, 2013). This can inform the nature of the content of such initiatives as well as identifying strategies for encouraging participation. Consequently, this thesis contributes, not only to the development of our understanding of identities processes, but also our understanding of providing support for those affected by parental incarceration.
References


Appendix A

Parenting Program Father Interview Schedule

Background

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself?
   a. Did you grown up locally?
2. What was your own childhood like?
3. What kind of relationship did you have with your own parents?
4. How would you describe your own parents?

Visits

5. Do your own family visit you much?
6. How would you describe the experience of those visits for you/ for your parents/wife/child?
7. What are the part of visits you most enjoy?
8. What would you most like to see changed in the current system?
9. What could be changed in the current system to support fathers and families?

The Role of a Father

10. Do you have a big family (Siblings/nieces/nephews)
    a. How many children do you have?
11. What are your expectations of the parenting programme?/how have you found the parenting programme?
12. How might your partner/child describe you as a parent?
13. How would you describe yourself as a parent? Your strengths/ your weakness?
Appendix B

Parenting Programme Mother interview

Background

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself?
   a. Did you grow up locally?
2. What was your own childhood like?
3. What kind of relationship did you have with your own parents?
4. How would you describe your own parents?

Visits

5. Do you visit the prison much?
6. How would you describe the experience of those visits for you/ for your child/ for your partner?
7. What are the part of visits you most enjoy?
8. What would you most like to see changed in the current system?
9. What could be changed in the current system to support families?

Your role as a mother

10. Do you have a big family (Siblings/nieces/nephews)
    a. How many children do you have?
11. What are your expectations of the parenting programme?/how have you found the parenting programme?
12. How might your partner/child describe you as a parent?
13. How would you describe yourself as a parent? Your strengths/ your weakness?