



Ministry of
JUSTICE

Prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds

Results from the Surveying Prisoner
Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal
cohort study of prisoners

Kim Williams, Vea Papadopoulou and Natalie Booth
Ministry of Justice Analytical Services

Ministry of Justice Research Series 4/12
March 2012

Prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds

Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners

Kim Williams, Vea Papadopoulou and Natalie Booth
Ministry of Justice Analytical Services

This information is also available on the Ministry of Justice website:
<http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/research-and-analysis/moj>

Analytical Services exists to improve policymaking, decision taking and practice by the Ministry of Justice. It does this by providing robust, timely and relevant data and advice drawn from research and analysis undertaken by the department's analysts and by the wider research community.

Disclaimer

The views expressed are those of the authors and are not necessarily shared by the Ministry of Justice (nor do they represent Government policy).

© Crown Copyright 2012

Extracts from this document may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes on condition that the source is acknowledged.

First published 2012

ISBN: 978-1-84099-544-2

Acknowledgements

SPCR was funded by the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department of Health, and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (now the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills).

Thanks are due to Ipsos MORI, whose staff collected the data for this research.

Special thanks are due to the prisoners who participated in this survey, and governors and staff at participating prisons.

Thanks are also extended to colleagues in Offender Management and Sentencing Analytical Services, the National Offender Management Service, and the Ministry of Justice, all of whom have contributed to this report.

Contents

List of tables

Summary	i
1. Context and aims	1
1.1 Approach	2
1.2 Limitations	5
2. Results	7
2.1 Prisoners' past family circumstances: childhood and background experiences	7
Living arrangements and experiences of care	7
Abuse and violence in the home	9
Family criminality	11
Family substance abuse problems	13
Schooling and qualifications	14
2.2 Prisoners' present family circumstances: current family and attitudes	15
Current family	15
The number of children affected by imprisonment of a parent	16
Attitudes	21
3. Conclusion and implications	24
References	26

List of tables

Table 1.1: SPCR participants: gender, ethnicity, age and reconviction status	4
Table 1.2: SPCR participants: detailed ethnicity groupings	5
Table 1.3: Sentence length of SPCR participants (Sample 1)	5
Table 1.4: Sentence length of SPCR participants (Samples 1 and 2 combined)	5
Table 2.1: Who SPCR respondents lived with as a child	8
Table 2.2: SPCR respondents experiencing abuse or observing violence as a child	9
Table 2.3: Types of abuse experienced by SPCR respondents who reported having been abused as a child	9
Table 2.4: SPCR respondents' family criminality	11
Table 2.5: SPCR respondents reporting family substance abuse problems	13
Table 2.6: SPCR respondents' truancy and exclusion	14
Table 2.7: SPCR respondents' marital status	16
Table 2.8: Attitudes to factors in reducing reoffending	22

Summary

This report looks at the past and present family circumstances of 1,435 newly sentenced (in 2005 and 2006) prisoners. It examines their childhood and family background, their current family relationships, and associations between background/family characteristics and reoffending. In considering current family circumstances, it also estimates the number of children in England and Wales affected by parental imprisonment.

Context

- There is growing interest in the relationship between offenders and their families, both in terms of the role of family as a conduit to reducing reoffending and how offending behaviour affects children and families.
- Working with families of prisoners could represent significant benefits for society in terms of reduced reoffending and other positive outcomes.
- Some of the data in this report has already been published. This report aims to inform policymaking on preventing offending and reoffending by bringing together published information and new findings on prisoners' children and families. It has a particular focus on experiences of care and abuse as a child, other family problems such as substance abuse and criminality, and any associations between these factors and reconviction. It also estimates the number of children affected by imprisonment of a parent.

Approach

- This report is based on Wave 1 of a longitudinal cohort study (Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction – SPCR). SPCR tracked the progress of newly sentenced prisoners in England and Wales.
- The study was undertaken with an overall sample of 3,849 prisoners, which is comprised of a representative sample (Sample 1) of 1,435 prisoners sentenced from one month to four years, and a longer-term prisoner sample (Sample 2) of 2,414 prisoners sentenced to between 18 months and four years.
- Both samples were matched to the Police National Computer (PNC), allowing reconviction rates in the year after release from custody to be calculated. Not all prisoners could be matched to the PNC: the final reoffending sample for Sample 1 included 1,331 prisoners.

- Results in this report are mostly based on Sample 1, as it is largely representative¹ of prison receptions. However, where comparisons are made by sentence length, Sample 1 and Sample 2 are combined, and results are presented as comparisons between those sentenced to 12 months or less, and those sentenced to between 12 months and four years.
- Estimates of the number of children who had a parent in prison in 2006 were made using information from SPCR and from prison population statistics.

Results

Many prisoners had problematic backgrounds:

- Twenty-four per cent stated that they had been in care at some point during their childhood. Those who had been in care were younger when they were first arrested, and were more likely to be reconvicted in the year after release from custody than those who had never been in care.
- Many prisoners had experienced abuse (29%) or observed violence in the home (41%) as a child – particularly those who stated that they had a family member with an alcohol or drug problem. Those who reported experiencing abuse or observing violence as a child were more likely to be reconvicted in the year after release than those who did not.
- Thirty-seven per cent of prisoners reported having family members who had been convicted of a non-motoring criminal offence, of whom 84% had been in prison, a young offenders' institution or borstal. Prisoners with a convicted family member were more likely to be reconvicted in the year after release from custody than those without a convicted family member.
- Eighteen per cent of prisoners stated that they had a family member with an alcohol problem, and 14% with a drug problem.
- Fifty-nine per cent of prisoners stated that they had regularly played truant from school, 63% had been suspended or temporarily excluded, and 42% stated that they had been permanently excluded or expelled. Prisoners with these issues were more likely to be reconvicted on release than those without.

¹ See Technical Reports for details.

Most prisoners have children and report being close to their families:

- Fifty-four per cent of all prisoners reported having children under the age of 18. Most prisoners (61%) reported being single when they entered custody. Twenty-four per cent were living with a partner, and 8% married.
- Based on the number of unique persons estimated to have been in prison in 2009, and the average number of children reported by prisoners in the SPCR sample, it is estimated that approximately 200,000 children had a parent in prison *at some point* in 2009. Looking at the number of children with a parent in prison *at a single point in time*, approximately 90,000 children had a parent in prison at the end of June 2009.
- The vast majority of prisoners reported being close to their families (74%), providing and receiving emotional support (63% and 73% respectively), and wanting their families involved in their lives (88%). Additionally, some prisoners saw the support of their families (40%), and being able to see their children (36%), as important in stopping them from reoffending in the future.

Implications

- This report demonstrates the importance of considering ‘static’² factors originating in childhood, alongside ‘dynamic’ factors, in assessing risk of offending and reoffending. Interventions to reduce reoffending and improve other outcomes can and should be targeted appropriately, taking into account prisoners’ individual characteristics and backgrounds and working with ‘troubled/problem’ families, because these static factors can be established at a young age.
- Findings on school exclusion and truancy indicate that interventions at, around, or before the point of exclusion could have a positive effect on these young people’s lives, reducing their likelihood of future offending or reoffending.
- Prisoners feel they have strong family ties and want their families to be involved in their lives. Maintaining family relationships may help prevent reoffending. Consideration should therefore be given to the adequacy of systems to facilitate family contact and involvement. The impact that parental imprisonment and this contact may have on the prisoners’ families should also be considered.

² Static factors do not change over time, whilst dynamic factors (e.g. drug addiction) can change (Andrews and Bonta, 2010).

1. Context and aims

Many prisoners have a history of social exclusion, being more likely than the general population to have grown up in care, poverty, and to have had a family member convicted of a criminal offence (Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), 2002 ('the SEU Report'); Ministry of Justice, 2010a). Family networks are valued by prisoners (Ministry of Justice, 2010a), have been associated with reducing reoffending among ex-prisoners (SEU, 2002; May, Sharma and Stewart, 2008), and assisting prisoners settling into communities (SEU, 2002). Imprisonment also impacts on the lives of family members: prisoners' families are likely to experience increased financial, emotional and health problems when a family member is imprisoned (SEU, 2002).

Working with families of prisoners could represent significant savings for society as a result of the costs of reoffending and other outcomes, including health, family breakdown, poor child outcomes and inter-generational offending (Ministry of Justice, 2009). The Ministry of Justice's Green Paper, *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders* (2010b), reiterated the importance of familial ties in helping to reduce reoffending and in assisting successful rehabilitation.

The aim of this report is to inform policymaking on preventing offending and reoffending by providing a detailed summary of new and already published information on newly sentenced adult prisoners' past and current family backgrounds, their attitudes towards family relationships, and their role in prisoners' lives, using a longitudinal cohort study of prisoners. Headline findings from SPCR have been previously published in the MoJ's (2010a) *Compendium of reoffending statistics and analysis*. However, the current report adds to this by:

- exploring any differences in the above between men and women prisoners, short-term (less than 12 months) and longer-term (12 months to four years) sentenced prisoners, prisoners from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background, and prisoners from a non-BAME background, to assess differing need and support requirements under the Equality Act 2010;
- reporting any associations between these factors and reconviction (using data from the Police National Computer – PNC) in the year after release from prison;
- estimating the number of children who had at least one parent in prison in England and Wales, using SPCR data and prison population data; and
- where possible, contextualising the SPCR results using UK and international research on prisoners' children and families.

1.1 Approach

This report is based on the results of Wave 1 of a longitudinal cohort study (Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction – SPCR).

SPCR is a longitudinal cohort study which tracked the progress of newly sentenced adult (18+ years) prisoners in England and Wales. It was commissioned by the Home Office/Ministry of Justice (MoJ),³ with fieldwork undertaken by Ipsos MORI. Respondents were sentenced in 2005 and 2006 to between one month and four years in prison. The overall sample of 3,849 prisoners consists of a largely representative (of prison receptions) sample (Sample 1) of 1,435 prisoners sentenced from one month to four years, and a second sample (Sample 2) of 2,414 prisoners sentenced to between 18 months and four years. The SPCR Technical Reports⁴ provide full details on the sampling and interviewing processes and questionnaires.

The survey was conducted in four waves.

- **Wave 1:** From interviews conducted on reception to prison, information was collected about the cohort of prisoners: their backgrounds and families, their offending history, their educational achievements and employment status, their attitudes and needs, and their plans and expectations upon release from prison.
- **Wave 2:** Data was collected from the same prisoners prior to release from prison (pre-release).
- **Waves 3 and 4:** Information was collected on prisoners' outcomes post-release, including education, employment, health, and family outcomes.

Survey participants were matched to the Police National Computer (PNC), allowing reconviction in the year after release from custody to be calculated. Some prisoners could not be matched to the PNC, meaning that the final reconviction sample was 1,331 prisoners (from Sample 1, total = 1,435 prisoners). Measuring true reoffending (the amount of crime committed after release from prison) is difficult, as only a proportion of crime is detected, sanctioned, and recorded. The PNC records reconviction (in court), and this paper only

³ Originally commissioned by Home Office Research Development and Statistics (RDS) and transferred to the Ministry of Justice Analytical Services when the Ministry of Justice was formed.

⁴ Published alongside this report.

reports whether an offender was reconvicted or not (yes/no measure) for an offence committed in the year after release from custody.⁵

Results in this report are mostly from Sample 1, which is representative of the prison reception population sentenced to between one month and four years in prison, to provide a representative picture of the majority of prison receptions.⁶ Where relevant, comparisons are made between key subgroups (gender, ethnicity, sentence length). Where comparisons are made between longer (12 months to four years) and short-term (less than 12 months) prisoners, both samples are combined. Because Sample 2 over-sampled women prisoners, adjustments were made to ensure women are not over-represented.⁷ This resulted in a total combined weighted sample of 3,606 prisoners (unweighted = 3,849).

Prisoners' ages at interview were calculated by the interviewer entering the prisoners' self-reported dates of birth into a laptop computer, and confirming with the prisoner the age calculated by the computer program. Ethnicity was determined by showing participants a show card with 16 ethnic classifications⁸ (plus 'not stated/refused').

Where comparisons are made between subgroups, only statistically significant results ($p < 0.05$) are discussed. The analysis is descriptive rather than explanatory. Areas of apparent difference or similarity between subgroups are noted but are intended to serve only as guides for exploration and analysis in future studies.

Where robust research studies were available to provide context for SPCR findings we have included them. However, as the volume and nature of research on the different topics under consideration in the paper varies, the amount of context provided for these topics consequently does so. Where comparisons between SPCR prisoners and the general population are made, these are made to statistics available closest to the year in which the SPCR cohort was sampled (2005/6). Some comparisons with the general population are made using data from the 2003 Offending, Crime and Justice Survey (OCJS), which is a sample of 10,079 participants, representative of the population aged 10 to 65 in England and

⁵ Offence must have been committed in the 12 months after release from custody; conviction in court for this offence may have occurred up to 18 months after release. Cautions, breaches, and historic convictions are excluded.

⁶ Less than 10% of prisoners were sentenced to more than four years in prison in 2006: *Offender management caseload statistics (annual)*, available at: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/statistics-and-data/prisons-and-probation/omcs-annual.htm>

⁷ This was achieved by weighting the women in the sample to match the prison reception population.

⁸ Based on the 2001 census: see Wave 1 Technical Report.

Wales. Data were obtained from the UK Data Archive,⁹ and weights applied following the Data Archive user guide. Some additional comparisons are made with results from the Resettlement Surveys, undertaken by the Home Office in 2001, 2003 and 2004. These surveys were conducted with approximately 2,000 prisoners each, in the last three weeks of their sentence, and focused on previous employment, qualifications and housing, and expectations concerning employment, training and housing after release.¹⁰

The key characteristics of SPCR prisoners, and whether they were reconvicted in the year after release from custody are as follows (totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding).

Table 1.1: SPCR participants: gender, ethnicity, age and reconviction status

Characteristic	Number	Per cent
Total self-report sample	1,435	100
Male	1,303	91
Female	132	9
Non-BAME background	1,211	85
BAME background	224	15
Young adults (18–20)	174	12
Older adults (21+)	1,261	88
Total reconviction sample	1,331	100
Reconvicted	694	52
Not reconvicted	637	48

‘Non-BAME’ included ‘White British’, ‘White Irish’, and ‘any other White background’. Prisoners of BAME backgrounds included all other ethnicities. Grouping ethnicities in this way was done to allow comparisons to be made between the majority ethnic group (white prisoners) and all other ethnic groups, but does not suggest that subgroups are similar. Small sample sizes for some ethnicities (Table 1.2) meant that inferring results from them may be misleading. No prisoners reported being from a Chinese background – hence there are 15 categories reported instead of the 2001 Census 16 categories.

⁹ Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS), core dataset, 2003.

¹⁰ For more information on the three Resettlement Surveys, see Niven, S. and Olagundoye, J. (2002) *Jobs and Homes: a survey of prisoners nearing release*, Home Office Findings 173 (available at: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/r173.pdf>), Niven, S. and Stewart, D. (2005) *Resettlement outcomes on release from prison in 2003*. Home Office Findings 248 (available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/r248.pdf>) and May, C., Sharma, N. and Stewart, D. (2008) *Factors linked to reoffending: a one-year follow-up of prisoners who took part in the Resettlement Surveys 2001, 2003 and 2004*. Ministry of Justice Research Summary 5 (available at: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/docs/research-factors-reoffending.pdf>).

Table 1.2: SPCR participants: detailed ethnicity groupings

Ethnicity	Number	Per cent
White British	1,147	80
White Irish	24	2
Any other White background	40	3
White and Black Caribbean	33	2
White and Black African	7	*
White and Asian	8	*
Any other mixed background	7	*
Asian or Asian British – Indian	15	*
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	22	2
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	8	*
Asian or Asian British – Any other Asian background	6	*
Black or Black British – Caribbean	61	4
Black or Black British – African	37	3
Black or Black British – Any other Black background	8	*
Any other ethnic group	12	*
Total	1,435	100

* Denotes a figure of less than or equal to 1%. Rounding and removal of small figures may result in totals not adding up to 100%.

Table 1.3: Sentence length of SPCR participants (Sample 1)

Sentence length	Number	Per cent
Less than 12 months	1,084	76
12 months to four years	351	25
Total	1,435	100

Rounding may result in totals not adding up to 100%.

Table 1.4: Sentence length of SPCR participants (Samples 1 and 2 combined)

Sentence length	Number	Per cent
One to 12 months	1,084	30
12 months to four years	2,522	70
Total (weighted)	3,606	100

Unweighted base: 3,849

1.2 Limitations

It is important to note that although the sample in the current survey is large overall (1,435 prisoners), that the numbers of some subgroups are relatively small (132 women compared with 1,303 men, for example, reflecting the smaller number of women in prison compared to men). Results based on small samples may not be reliable indicators of the wider population, and in some cases the sample sizes may be too small to detect differences which may

actually exist. Information on all technical and methodological issues is available in the Technical Reports.¹¹

Associations between prisoners' characteristics and experiences and reconviction on release are presented in this report. However, it is not known whether there are direct cause and effect relationships between the factors and reconviction. It is more likely that there are many interrelated factors which lead to reoffending, and this research does not provide any information on the relative contribution of any factor compared to any other.

There are many problems with extrapolating from figures on the number of prisoners with children to estimate the number of children who experience parental imprisonment, as the number of children per prisoner is not recorded as statutory practice within prisons. SPCR participants may not have disclosed whether they had children, or may not have disclosed all their children in the survey – which could be for a variety of reasons, including to protect their children and families, or because they do not know about them. In addition, prisoners were only asked about children under the age of 18. Information on all technical and methodological issues is available in the Technical Reports. Comparisons to the general population and other surveys are presented where appropriate to contextualise the findings of this survey. These should be treated as indicators rather than direct comparators.

¹¹ Published alongside this report.

2. Results

2.1 Prisoners' past family circumstances: childhood and background experiences

Research conducted in both the UK and US has suggested that adverse childhood experiences may lead to future criminality and antisocial behaviour (Farrington, 2000 and Dallaire, 2007). Such risk factors for future offending included low family income, delinquent or convicted family members, histories of violence, parental mental illness, poor relationships with parents, low IQ and low school attainment. This suggests that familial circumstances and relationships in childhood may have a strong influence on an individual's future and their behaviour.

Living arrangements and experiences of care

A significant minority of prisoners have lived in care, children's homes, or in the responsibility of the local authority at some point during their childhood (Caddle and Crisp, 1997; Dodd and Hunter, 1992). Caddle and Crisp's sample of female prisoners found that 15% of their sample had grown up in children's homes, and 20% overall had ever been taken into care. The 1991 National Prison Survey reported 26% of prisoners had been cared for by a local authority at some point in their childhood, compared to just 2% of the general population (Dodd and Hunter, 1992).

SPCR prisoners were asked who they lived with as a child (up to the age of 17). Eighteen per cent of prisoners stated that who they lived with changed at least once. These prisoners were asked who they lived with most of the time. Forty-seven per cent of the prisoners stated that they had lived with both natural parents and 34% with one natural parent all, or most of the time. Seven per cent of prisoners stated that they had lived in some sort of care (2% with foster parents and 5% in an institution) all, or most of the time.

Table 2.1: Who SPCR respondents lived with as a child

Lived with	Number	Per cent
Both natural parents	675	47
One natural parent	483	34
One step-parent and one natural parent	90	6
A step-parent only	2	*
Adopted parents	10	*
Grandparent(s)	40	3
Other relatives	20	1
Foster parents	27	2
In an institution (such as a children's home, borstal or young offenders unit)	70	5
Other	11	1
Total	1,428	100

Seven respondents did not answer this question

* Percentage has not been included due to a cell count of 10 or below

Results in italics should be treated with caution due to low cell counts

Rounding and removal of small figures may result in totals not adding up to 100%.

Prisoners who had not already stated that they lived with foster parents or in an institution were asked whether they had ever been taken into care at any point as a child. Overall, 24% (347 prisoners) stated that they lived with foster parents or in an institution, or had been taken into care at some point when they were a child. This includes both long- and short-term periods in care.

This is comparable to results from recent research on children and young people in custody, in which 27% of young men (n=1,052) reported having spent some time in care (Summerfield, 2011). Although the number of young women in this study was small (n=56), it indicated that they were more likely to have spent time in care (56% said that they had spent time in local authority care). Similarly, female SPCR prisoners (31%) were more likely to state they had been taken into care than male prisoners (24%). Prisoners from a non-BAME background (26%) were more likely when compared with prisoners from BAME groups (16%). Short-term prisoners were more likely than longer-term prisoners to state they had ever been in care as a child (26% compared to 20%).

Those who had been in care were of a lower average age when they were arrested for the first time (median = 13 years) than those who had never been in care (median = 16 years). Prisoners who had been in care as a child were more likely to be reconvicted following release from their current sentence than those who had not (61% compared to 49%).

Abuse and violence in the home

Links between directly experienced or observed violence in childhood and future criminal behaviour have been seen in previous research with a sample of imprisoned fathers in the UK (Boswell and Wedge, 2002). One in ten of the 181 imprisoned fathers in this study reported being physically abused by their fathers, with five percent also reporting having witnessed their father abusing their mother. Poehlmann’s (2005a) US study similarly found that around a third of imprisoned mothers in this purposively sampled study reported being sexually or physically abused, with over two-thirds witnessing domestic violence at some point during childhood. Other research also shows that adverse childhood experiences, including abuse and violence, can have an impact on future criminality and antisocial behaviour (Glasser et al, 2001; Boswell and Wedge, 2002).

SPCR prisoners were asked whether they had ever experienced abuse or observed violence as a child (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: SPCR respondents experiencing abuse or observing violence as a child

Issue	Number (base size)	Per cent
Ever experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse	412 (1,425)	29
Ever observed violence	579 (1,426)	41

Twenty-nine per cent of SPCR prisoners stated that they had experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse as a child. Women (53%) were more likely to report having experienced some sort of abuse than men (27%), as were prisoners from a non-BAME background (31%), compared with prisoners from a BAME background (20%). Those serving short-term sentences were more likely to state that they had experienced abuse as a child than those on longer-term sentences (29% compared with 24%). Prisoners who had reported experiencing some sort of abuse were asked what kind of abuse it was (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3: Types of abuse experienced by SPCR respondents who reported having been abused as a child

Type of abuse	Number	Per cent
Emotional	254	62
Physical	251	61
Sexual	128	31

Base size 412

Multiple responses possible

Female prisoners who had experienced abuse as a child were more likely to report suffering sexual abuse (67%) than male prisoners who had experienced abuse (24%). It is possible

that women are more likely to report sexual abuse than men. There were no significant differences between men and women for emotional and physical abuse. There was little difference between those from a non-BAME and BAME background and short- and longer-term prisoners who stated that they had suffered abuse with regards to the type of abuse they reported suffering.

Forty-one per cent of SPCR prisoners said that they had observed violence at home as a child. Women were more likely (50%) to report having observed violence at home than men (40%). Prisoners from a non-BAME background (42%) were more likely to report having observed violence than prisoners from a BAME group (32%), as were short-term prisoners compared to longer-term prisoners (42% compared to 36%).

Prisoners who stated they currently had a family member with an alcohol problem (18% of the sample) were more likely to report having experienced abuse as a child than those who did not report having family members with an alcohol problem (53% compared to 23%). These prisoners were also more likely to have reported observing violence in the home as a child (65% compared to 35%). Similar results were found for those stating that they had a current family member with a drug problem (14% of the sample). Forty-two per cent of these prisoners stated that they had experienced abuse, and 62% reported they had observed violence as a child, compared to 26% and 36% respectively of those who did not.

Although not directly comparable (as SPCR looked at self-reported abuse, whereas Cawson et al (2000) looked at 'maltreatment', which may not be seen by survey respondents as the same as 'abuse') Cawson et al's study of the prevalence of child maltreatment in the UK found that a quarter of UK children had experienced at least one form of physical violence during childhood, of whom for a fifth this violence was constant or frequent. The majority of this violent treatment occurred at home. Approximately 6% experienced frequent and severe emotional maltreatment during childhood, and over a quarter (26%) of young adults reported that they had seen physical violence between their carers at least once, with 5% living with constant or frequent violence between their carers.

Those SPCR prisoners who had experienced abuse or observed violence in the home as a child were more likely than those who had not to be reconvicted after release from custody (58% of those who had experienced abuse were reconvicted, compared to 50% who had not, and 58% who had observed violence were reconvicted, compared to 48% who had not).

Family criminality

A number of research studies have examined the ‘intergenerational transmission’ of criminal careers. Analysis of the longitudinal Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development (CSDD) (Farrington, 2000) found a relationship between adverse risk factors in childhood and adult antisocial personalities when aged 18 and 32, with the most predominant risk factor being a convicted parent. Similarly, Dallaire (2007) found that adult children of prisoners were more likely to have a conviction, the more risk factors reported. In addition to this, adult children of imprisoned mothers were more likely to be convicted than adult children from imprisoned fathers.

SPCR respondents were asked whether someone in their family, other than themselves, had been found guilty of a non-motoring criminal offence.

Table 2.4: SPCR respondents’ family criminality

Issue	Number (base size)	Per cent
Whether someone in family found guilty of a criminal offence	519 (1,406)	37
Of those with family member guilty of criminal offence, whether someone in family ever been in prison, young offenders’ institution or borstal	435 (516)	84

Thirty-seven per cent responded positively. In most of the cases that family member was male (in 56% of the cases that person was their brother or step-brother and 35% the father/step-father). Short- and longer-term prisoners were equally likely to report having someone in their family who has ever been found guilty of a criminal offence, as were women and men. Prisoners from non-BAME backgrounds (40%) were more likely than prisoners from BAME backgrounds (23%) to have a family member found guilty of a non-motoring criminal offence.

Of the SPCR prisoners with a convicted family member, 84% (or 30% of the whole sample) of these family members had been in prison, a young offenders’ institution, or borstal. Again, the most frequent responses were brother/stepbrother (56% of cases) and father/stepfather (35% of cases). Prisoners who stated they had a family member who had been found guilty of a non-motoring criminal offence were more likely than those who did not to be reconvicted following release from custody (59% compared to 48%), although reconviction rates did not vary with whether that family member had been in prison or not.

Other studies suggest that between a third and a half of prisoners have family members with a criminal conviction (Withers and Folsom, 2007; Dodd and Hunter, 1992; Sharp et al, 1997), and that the 'transmission' is more apparent between same sex relatives (Rowe and Farrington, 1997). Research indicates that these family members are often either their parents or siblings, with more criminality apparent between same sex relatives – such as between father and son, or mother and daughter (Rowe and Farrington, 1997; Farrington, 2000; and Dodd and Hunter, 1992).

The transmission of criminality from parents to offspring has been found to be stronger when the parents are imprisoned as opposed to just having a conviction (although this was not observed in SPCR), when a parent is imprisoned for a longer sentence, or when a parent is imprisoned in their children's lifetime (Murray, Janson and Farrington, 2007; Besemer et al, 2011). In addition to this, previous research implies that the age of the child during their parent's imprisonment may be linked to the child's future criminal behaviour, with Besemer et al (ibid) reporting that parental imprisonment during a child's adolescence is more likely to instigate criminal behaviour. Parental imprisonment before the child is aged 10 is seen to have more influence on the likelihood of antisocial behaviour and delinquency than other adverse childhood experiences, including parental separation and parental hospitalisation (Farrington, 2000; and Murray and Farrington, 2005).

The Offending, Crime, and Justice Survey (OCJS, 2003),¹² a survey of 10,079 people in the general household population aged 10 to 65, asked whether participants' parents or guardians had ever been in trouble with the police. Looking only at those 18 and over (for comparability with the SPCR sample), 5%¹³ replied yes, their parent(s)/guardian(s) had been in trouble with the police, of which 30% said that their parent(s)/guardian(s) had been imprisoned, which was approximately 2%¹⁴ of the whole sample of this age.¹⁵ This compares, although not directly, with the nearly one-third of SPCR respondents who reported having a *family member* who had ever been imprisoned, above. OCJS respondents who reported that their parent(s)/guardian(s) had ever been in trouble with the police were more likely to report having offended themselves, compared to those who reported that their parent(s)/guardian(s) had not been in trouble with the police (62% compared with 39% for all

¹² Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS), core dataset, 2003. Weights were applied following the Data Archive user guide.

¹³ 452 positive responses out of 8,432 valid answers. (Valid responses include 102 'don't know' and 19 'don't want to answer'.)

¹⁴ 137 positive responses out of 8,432 valid responses (including six 'don't know' and 'don't want to answer').

¹⁵ For all age groups in the OCJS, 6% replied 'yes', and of these 6%, nearly one-third (28%) stated that their parent(s)/guardian(s) had been imprisoned, meaning that approximately 2% of the general population had parent(s)/guardian(s) who had ever been imprisoned.

ages; 60% compared with 39% for over 18s). Rates of self-reported offending among OCJS respondents who had a parent(s)/guardian(s) in trouble with the police did not vary according to whether the parent(s)/guardian(s) had been in prison or not.

Family substance abuse problems

Respondents were asked about whether they had family members with various substance abuse problems.

Table 2.5: SPCR respondents reporting family substance abuse problems

Issue	Number (base size)	Per cent
Family member with current alcohol problem	257 (1,397)	18
Family member with current drug problem	195 (1,401)	14
Family member with a drug and/or alcohol problem	380 (1,398)	27

Eighteen per cent of the SPCR prisoners reported having family members with a current alcohol problem. Women (30%) were more likely to report having a family member with a current alcohol problem than men (17%). Prisoners from a non-BAME background (21%) were more likely to report having a family member with a current alcohol problem than BAME background prisoners (6%). There was little difference between short- and longer-term prisoners.

In 41% of cases, the person with the alcohol problem was the prisoner’s father or step-father, 26% their mother or step-mother, and 24% their brother or step-brother.

Fourteen per cent of SPCR prisoners stated that they had a family member with a current drug problem. Female prisoners (22%) were more likely to report having a family member with a current drug problem than male prisoners (13%), and non-BAME background prisoners (15%) were more likely to report having a family member with a current drug problem than prisoners from a BAME background (8%). Again, there was little difference between short- and longer-term prisoners. For most prisoners (59%), the family member with a drug problem was either their brother or step-brother. Nineteen per cent stated other adult relatives and 15% sister/step-sister.

Prisoners who had a family member with an alcohol problem were more likely to state that they needed help with an alcohol problem themselves (31%) than those who did not have a family member with an alcohol problem (12%). Similarly, prisoners who had a family member with a drug problem were more likely to state that they needed help with a drug problem (52%) than those who did not (28%).

About 27% of the prisoners had a member of their family with a drug and/or alcohol problem. Approximately five per cent of the prisoners had a family member with both a drug and an alcohol problem.

Schooling and qualifications

Previous research has pointed to high levels of truancy and exclusion among offenders (SEU, 2002). Exclusion from school is known to be a factor in future offending, although a straightforward causal relationship is difficult to establish (Berridge et al, 2001).

SPCR prisoners were asked about their schooling, including truancy and exclusion.

Table 2.6: SPCR respondents’ truancy and exclusion

Issue	Number (base size)	Per cent
Regularly played truant or skipped school	838 (1,425)	59
Ever suspended or temporarily excluded	900 (1,423)	63
Ever expelled or permanently excluded	596 (1,426)	42

Fifty-nine per cent of prisoners reported regularly playing truant, which is much higher than the 30% of prisoners reported by the SEU Report (2002). Sixty-three per cent reported having been temporarily excluded from school, and 42% permanently excluded, compared with the 49% of male prisoners reported having been excluded from school by SEU (2002). In 2005/06 in England, the proportion of school pupils permanently excluded from school was less than one per cent (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008).¹⁶

Women were less likely than men to report having ever been suspended or temporarily excluded from school (47% compared with 65%), and having ever been expelled or permanently excluded from school (32% compared with 43%). Consistent with this, national figures on exclusion demonstrate that boys are four times more likely to be permanently excluded from school, and three times more likely to be temporarily excluded (Department for Education, 2011). There was no difference between the percentage of men and women reporting regularly playing truant or skipping school without permission.

Non-BAME background prisoners were more likely than prisoners from a BAME group to report regularly playing truant or skipping school without permission (62% compared with 44%), ever having been suspended or temporarily excluded from school (65% compared

¹⁶ This figure is a snapshot and is not comparable with the cumulative figure reported by SPCR participants.

with 53%), and having ever been expelled or permanently excluded from school (44% compared with 30%).

Short-term prisoners were more likely than longer-term prisoners to have been suspended or temporarily excluded from school (64% compared with 57%) and to have been expelled or permanently excluded from school (43% compared with 36%). Prisoners of different sentence lengths were equally likely to have played truant or skipped school without permission.

Prisoners who reported having played truant at school, being expelled or permanently excluded, were more likely to be reconvicted on release from custody compared with those who did not report these issues (61% and 63%, compared with 39% and 44%, respectively).

Participants were asked at what age they had completed continuous, full-time school or college. Nineteen per cent had completed by the age of 14, 49% by the age of 15, 85% by 16 (the school leaving age in the UK) and 95% by 18. SEU (2002) reported that for younger prisoners, 25% had terminated their education by the age of 14, which is reasonably consistent with the current findings. In the general population, in 1998, 49% of 18-year-olds were still in education, although this figure includes part-time education (Office for National Statistics, 1998).

2.2 Prisoners' present family circumstances: current family and attitudes

Current family

Prisoner contact with their families is important in facilitating offenders' transitions back into society, and therefore in reducing reoffending when they are released from prison (Niven and Olagundoye, 2002; Niven and Stewart, 2005; May, Sharma and Stewart, 2008). For instance, May, Sharma and Stewart (2008) found that receiving visits during imprisonment, or having a close partner or spouse, increased the likelihood of a prisoner reporting employment and accommodation organised on release, and resulted in a lower reconviction rate in the year after release from prison.

Sixty-one per cent of the SPCR prisoners stated that they were single when they came into custody. Twenty-four per cent were living with a partner and 8% married.

Table 2.7: SPCR respondents' marital status

Marital status	Number	Per cent
Married	115	8
Living with a partner	338	24
Single	871	61
Widowed	7	*
Divorced	68	5
Separated from husband/wife	33	2
Total	1,432	100

Three respondents did not answer this question

* Percentage has not been included due to a cell count of 10 or below

Results in italics should be treated with caution due to low cell counts

Rounding and removal of small figures may result in totals not adding up to 100%.

Women and men were equally likely to be single, married or living with a partner. Prisoners from a BAME background were more likely to be married (17%) than non-BAME background prisoners (7%) and less likely to state that they were living with a partner (15%) than non-BAME background prisoners (25%), but equally likely to be single. Those with sentences of a year or longer were more likely to respond they were married (11%) compared with short-term prisoners (7%), less likely to respond that they were single than short-term prisoners (55% compared with 62%), and equally likely to respond that they were living with a partner.

Some studies show that prisoners are less likely than the general population to be in stable relationships and are more likely to be younger or single parents (SEU, 2002). Consistent with this, almost half of those SPCR prisoners who stated they had children were single (49%),¹⁷ and 19% of prisoners between 18–20 years old stated that they had children under 18 years old (which can be compared to 4% of the general population who are young fathers (SEU, 2002)).

The number of children affected by imprisonment of a parent

As noted earlier, estimating the number of prisoners' children is problematic, as SPCR participants may not have disclosed all their children in the survey. However, 54% per cent of SPCR prisoners stated that they had children under the age of 18 at the time they entered prison. Prisoners with children reported on average 2.1 children, which equates to 1.14

¹⁷ This figure excludes those who were divorced, separated and widowed. Including these the figure rises to approximately 57%.

children per SPCR prisoner (1,632 children reported by the 1,433 prisoners who answered this question).¹⁸

This figure can be used to estimate the total number of children affected by parental imprisonment. There are two ways of counting the number of children experiencing parental imprisonment (Murray and Farrington, 2008). The first is to estimate how many children have a parent in prison at one point in time, which Murray and Farrington refer to as 'point prevalence' – i.e. relating to the 'stock' prison population. The other is the 'cumulative prevalence', which is an estimate of how many children have a parent imprisoned at some stage during a period of time. Although some surveys have attempted to establish the cumulative prevalence of children experiencing parental imprisonment, these have been small-scale and there has previously been little evidence-based statistics on this issue (Murray and Farrington, 2008).

To establish 'point prevalence', we need to look at the 'stock' prison population statistics available. As at end 30 June 2006 (SPCR was conducted in 2005/6), there were 75,542 prisoners aged 18 and over in prison establishments (Ministry of Justice, 2010c, Table 7.1). This includes prisoners serving sentences of more than four years and on remand. An average of 1.14 children per prisoner results in a total of approximately 86,000 children with a parent imprisoned at that point. (These estimates assume that long-term and remand prisoners had the same average number of children as prisoners sentenced up to four years.)

These results based on SPCR are broadly comparable to Murray and Farrington's (2008) estimate that 88,000 children (0.8 per cent) in England and Wales had a parent in prison in mid-year 2006.¹⁹

A cumulative figure for the number of children affected by parental imprisonment *at some point* over a year (i.e. with a parent in, or going into, prison), can be estimated using analysis from MoJ's Data Improvement Project.²⁰ The Data Improvement Project provides an estimate of the number of unique persons estimated to have been in prison in 2009.

¹⁸ There were no statistically significant differences between men and women.

¹⁹ Based on the number of children under 18 in England and Wales in June 2006, the number of prisoners in England and Wales in June 2006, and estimates that imprisoned men have, on average, 1.15 children, and imprisoned women have, on average, 1.36 children.

²⁰ <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/statistics-and-data/criminal-justice/criminal-justice-statistics.htm>

First, looking at the 2009 'stock' prison population statistics to establish point prevalence for the same year (for comparability with Data Improvement Project data), there was a total of 81,352 prisoners aged 18 and over at the end of June 2009 (Ministry of Justice, 2010c, Table 7.1). Using the average of 1.14 children per prisoner results in a total of approximately 93,000 children with a parent in prison. This is again comparable with Murray and Farrington's estimate.

The Data Improvement Project estimates that in 2009 there were a total of 185,112 unique persons in prison. Using the 2009 'stock' figures (Ministry of Justice, 2010c, Table 7.1), 97.5%²¹ of prisoners were aged 18 and over.²² Therefore in 2009, of 185,112 unique persons, 180,447 were adults. This results in a total of approximately 200,000 children who had a parent in prison at some point in 2009. (Again, these estimates assume that long-term and remand prisoners had the same average number of children as prisoners sentenced up to four years, and also that this average remained consistent between 2006 (when SPCR was conducted) and 2009).

Previous estimates of the numbers of children experiencing parental imprisonment have varied. SEU (2002) reported that 125,000 'have a parent in prison', although it is not clear how this figure was calculated. In 2007, it was estimated that up to 160,000 children in the UK had a parent in prison *at some point* in 2005 (Department for Children, Schools and Families and Ministry of Justice, 2007). This figure is based on self-reported parenting among a sample of 1,945 prisoners surveyed in 2003²³ (Niven and Stewart, 2005), and includes the population in custody as well as the flow into prison. Additionally, the report states that as some prisoners were in custody more than once during the year, they were counted twice.

Previous literature suggests that prisoners' families and children may be adversely affected when a parent is taken into custody. Imprisonment of parents may result in a change of living and care arrangements for children (particularly for the children of female prisoners) (Caddle and Crisp, 1997; Murray, Janson and Farrington, 2007; Dodd and Hunter, 1992; Dallaire, 2007; Sharp et al, 1997; Mumola, 2000). Offenders' families may also experience financial constraints during imprisonment, with problems such as income reductions, moving into

²¹ 97.48%.

²² 81,352 of 83,454 prisoners.

²³ This figure was calculated on the basis that prisoners had an average of 0.87 children. This was then multiplied by the number of British nationals who were in custody at some point during the year.

cheaper accommodation, and further reliance on benefits (Arditti, Lambert-Shute and Joest, 2003; Sharp et al, 1997; Bahr et al, 2005; Caddle and Crisp, 1997).

Research from the UK and US suggests that around half of imprisoned mothers and fathers lived with their children before imprisonment (Mumola, 2000; Caddle and Crisp, 1997; Murray, 2007). As a result of the imprisonment of the parent, children of offenders often lived with the remaining parent, or other family members, for the duration of their parent's imprisonment (Caddle and Crisp, 1997; Murray, 2007; Dodd and Hunter, 1992; Dallaire, 2007; Sharp et al, 1997; Mumola, 2000). Other findings indicate a difference in who becomes the children's caregiver depending on the gender of the imprisoned parent. During paternal imprisonment, it has been reported that over three-quarters of the children lived with their mother (Murray, 2007; Dallaire, 2007; Withers and Folsom, 2007). This is similar to findings from *The National Prison Survey*, where 64% of male prisoner's children – compared to 18% of female prisoner's children – were being cared for by the prisoner's partner (Dodd and Hunter, 1992). Conversely, during maternal imprisonment, the alternative primary caregivers are often the grandparents or other female relatives (Caddle and Crisp, 1997; Sharp et al, 1997; Mumola, 2000; Dallaire, 2007). Parental imprisonment can therefore have a considerable effect on the living and care arrangements for the children and families of offenders, and has different effects depending on which parent is imprisoned.

Analysis of the Resettlement Surveys supports this previous evidence on changes to living arrangements of children following parental imprisonment.²⁴ Most respondents to the Resettlement Surveys did not live with their dependent children before custody, although this differed according to gender. In the 2003 survey, 45% of men who reported having dependent children also reported²⁵ living with them before custody, compared to 62% of women. The 2004 survey found this to be 43% compared to 58%. Similar to results in the literature described above, most men reported that these children were now living with their partner (90% from the 2003 survey, 94% from 2004). Only 21% (2003) and 27% (2004) of women reported that this was the case; it was more likely that the children were now living with another family member (75% and 77% of women in the 2003 and 2004 surveys respectively, compared to 12% and 10% of men). A small percentage of prisoners reported that the children who were living with them before custody were now living in care (1% of

²⁴ 2003 and 2004 surveys only: the 2001 survey did not ask the relevant questions. Prisoners in young offenders' institutions were not included in this analysis.

²⁵ Directly or indirectly: prisoners were asked whether their dependent children lived with them, and were also asked who they were living with before custody. Those who said 'yes' to the first question, and who said that they were living with dependent children in the second question, were included.

men in 2003 and 2004, 4% of women in 2003, and 2% of women in 2004).²⁶ This difference in changes to children's living arrangements according to prisoner gender may reflect the fact that women were more likely to live on their own with dependent children than men. In the 2003 Resettlement Survey, around half of women living with dependent children reported living alone with these children, compared to less than one in ten men. The 2004 survey found this to be around one-third of women compared to around one in twenty men.²⁷

Around one-fifth of SPCR prisoners (not including those who reported being homeless or sleeping rough before custody) reported that they lived with their dependent children under the age of 18 at the time of imprisonment, in response to an open question about who they lived with before custody (not a direct question about whether they lived with their children). Of the prisoners who reported having at least one child of this age, only around one-third reported that they lived with their children before custody. There is no information about where the remaining two-thirds of prisoners' children lived before custody. Many of these prisoners will have lived with their children, but not reported it.²⁸ There was no difference in the proportions of men and women prisoners who reported living with dependent children: 212 men and 25 women prisoners reported living with their dependent children before they came into custody, compared with 438 men and 43 women who did **not** report living with these children.

There has been very limited research undertaken with children of prisoners themselves. Findings from qualitative interviews conducted with the children of imprisoned parents (n=17) indicated a range of emotions relating to their situation, including being upset, angry, and shocked, as well as hoping that their father will return, with their biggest fear being that he may not (Boswell and Wedge, 2002). Children also had the feeling of being stigmatised, reporting that they often kept their parents imprisonment a secret from others around them (Nesmith and Ruhland, 2008). Some of the children interviewed were also protective of their female caregivers, reporting that on release from prison, their fathers were sometimes violent

²⁶ Only those who responded 'yes' to the question about whether their dependent children lived with them were asked where their children were living now (those who reported living with dependent children indirectly – see footnote 23 – were not asked where their children were now).

²⁷ 2003: 30 out of 58 women; 26 out of 307 men. 2004: 22 out of 63 women; 12 out of 295 men. Calculated using respondents' who reported living with dependent children directly or indirectly – see footnote 23 – and included answers to questions about who lived in their accommodation with them prior to custody.

²⁸ Another survey question asked some (but not all) of the prisoners who reported having children whether these children lived with them before custody. Forty-eight prisoners, in addition to those who had already volunteered that they lived with their children before custody, reported that their children lived with them, increasing the total number of prisoners reporting living with their dependent children to 285 (from 237), out of 776 prisoners who reported having dependent children under 18.

towards their mothers, which implies that prison can sometimes act as a safeguard to families.

Studies asking adult caregivers about the effect of parental imprisonment on the children of offenders have reported varied findings. Some stated that the children have behavioural problems, including being angry, upset, naughty, confused, withdrawn, detached or depressed, as well as experiencing problems with bullying and academic underachievement (Caddle and Crisp, 1997; Murray and Farrington, 2005; Poehlmann, 2005b; Sharp et al, 1997). Murray et al's (2009) review found that children of prisoners have about twice the risk of antisocial behaviour and poor mental health outcomes compared to children without imprisoned parents, although it is difficult to establish causality as these problems may have been caused by other disadvantages in children's lives that existed before parental imprisonment occurred.

Attitudes

SPCR prisoners were asked about the different types of help that they might need during imprisonment or for when they are released. Among these, 15% of prisoners stated that they needed help concerning problems related to family or children, with 8% requiring a lot of help. Women (27%) were more likely than men (13%) to report being in need of help with a problem concerning family or children. The results were the same for BAME and non-BAME prisoners, and short- and longer-term prisoners.

Forty per cent of SPCR prisoners stated that support from their family, and 36% that seeing their children, would help them stop reoffending in the future. (Having a job (68%) and having a place to live (60%) were the factors that were most often seen as important – see Table 14.) Women (51%) were more likely than men (39%) to say that getting support from their family would help them stop reoffending. Prisoners from BAME and non-BAME backgrounds were equally likely to say that this would help, as were those on short and longer sentences. Those on sentences of more than 12 months were more likely than short-term prisoners to say that support from their family would be important in stopping them reoffending (48% compared to 39%), although the results were the same for all these groups in terms of the importance of seeing their children.

Table 2.8: Attitudes to factors in reducing reoffending

Attitudes to factors in reducing reoffending	n	% of responses
Having a place to live	865	60
Having a job	976	68
Having access to health care	195	14
Having enough money to support myself	739	52
Not using drugs	664	46
Not drinking too much alcohol	487	34
Having treatment and support for drug and alcohol problems	384	27
Getting support from my family	571	40
Seeing my children	517	36
Getting support from my friends	390	27
Avoiding certain people	675	47
Fear of returning to prison	599	42
Something else	103	7
None of these	68	5

Base size 1,435

Multiple responses possible

When asked how likely they considered it was that they would be back in prison at some time in the future, most SPCR prisoners (70%) said that they did not consider it likely (42% of which stated that it was not at all likely). There was little difference between those with and without children under the age of 18 in terms of whether they felt it was likely that they would be back in prison at some time in the future. However, in contrast, there was a difference between the two groups in terms of actual convictions, as those without children had higher one-year conviction rates than those with (56% compared to 49%).

SPCR prisoners were asked about their family relationships. The majority of the prisoners agreed/strongly agreed that they felt close to their family (74%), and that they would want their family to be involved in their life (88%). Most prisoners stated that they were a source of emotional support for their family (64%) and that their family was a source of emotional support for them (74%). Half of them (51%) felt that the care of their family was mainly their responsibility. The majority of the prisoners stated that they felt that they had let their family down by being sent to prison (82%).

Over a third of fathers in another study reported feeling 'guilty' or 'ashamed' at being an imprisoned parent (Boswell and Wedge, 2002). Similarly, imprisoned mothers reported feelings of guilt as well as helplessness, stress, and stigmatisation owing to their separation from their children (Dodge and Pogrebin, 2001).

Research undertaken with female prisoners in the UK suggests a relationship between offending and their familial relationships. Caddle and Crisp (1997) reported that over a third of the women interviewed said they had committed their crime for reasons such as 'family problems' or to 'support children'. However, little other research has explored the motives of the offenders and so it is not known how far these results can be generalised to the male population, or wider prison population.

3. Conclusion and implications

The aim of this report was to explore, collate, and contextualise the past and present family circumstances of prisoners and their associations with reoffending, using results from the SPCR survey. It has a particular focus on experiences of care and abuse as a child, other family problems such as substance abuse and criminality, and associations between these factors and reconviction. Another aim was to estimate the number of children affected by parental imprisonment in England and Wales.

SPCR prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds were often problematic, with a large minority reporting having lived in care, or having experienced abuse and/or observed violence as a child. Those experiencing care, abuse, or having observed violence in the home as a child, had higher one-year reconviction rates than those without these issues. Those reporting having a convicted family member also had higher rates of reconviction on release than those without. This provides some support for theories of inter-generational transmission of criminality. Prisoners tended not to have fared well in education, with very high levels of truancy and exclusion from school. Each of these issues was associated with higher levels of reoffending compared with prisoners without these problems.

Prisoners' risk of reoffending is assessed using a range of 'static' and 'dynamic' factors. This report demonstrates that static factors originating in childhood are associated with reoffending, and therefore the importance of considering these, alongside dynamic factors, in the targeting of interventions to reduce reoffending.

SPCR findings on school exclusion and truancy indicate that it is possible that interventions at, around, or before the point of school exclusion could have a positive effect on these young people's lives, reducing their likelihood of future offending or reoffending. Previous research (Berridge et al, 2000) shows that it takes a long time to put in place alternative educational provision once young people have been excluded from school. It may be that investment in such provision could offer returns in terms of reducing the subsequent costs to the criminal justice system and society later on.

SPCR has shown that prisoners' demographics can also indicate need, and provide opportunities to target interventions appropriately to improve these prisoners' lives and reduce reoffending. There were differences between the childhood and background experiences of men and women, BAME and non-BAME background prisoners, and short-term and long-term prisoners. Women, non-BAME, and short-sentenced prisoners

were more likely than men, BAME, and longer-sentenced prisoners to report having been taken into care, experiencing abuse, and witnessing violence in the home as a child. Women tended to fare better at education, in terms of truancy and school exclusion, than men, as did prisoners from BAME groups and longer-sentenced prisoners compared with non-BAME background and short-sentenced prisoners.

SPCR prisoners' responses demonstrated that the majority see their families as important to them, and want them to be involved in their lives. Many prisoners also believe that support of their family and seeing their children would be important in stopping them from reoffending in the future. Given the role that prisoners see their families as having, and previous evidence that maintaining family relationships throughout the custody period can help prevent reoffending, it is important that consideration is given to the adequacy of support and mechanisms available for allowing contact and involvement of families in prisoners' sentences. This is also important given the effect that parental imprisonment has on children, the fact that most children who experience parental imprisonment are likely to experience it more than once,²⁹ and given the large number of children who experience parental imprisonment each year.

The estimate provided in this report for the number of children who experience parental imprisonment is the best estimate derived from SPCR data. However, it may be necessary to consider how this information is best collected in the future. Nonetheless, even systematic collection by prisons may itself be unlikely to be completely accurate, with the same issues experienced in SPCR – such as possible non-disclosure – likely to occur. In order to ensure that there are adequate services to support children experiencing parental imprisonment, it is necessary to have an agreed and accurate method as possible to gauge the extent of this issue (see also Murray and Farrington, 2008).

Results from later waves of the SPCR survey may provide further evidence on the role of prisoners' families – these waves included questions on contact with family during imprisonment, plans for release, and post-release accommodation and family relationships.

²⁹ 94% were convicted of an offence prior to their SPCR custodial sentence, and half had been in prison in the year before their SPCR sentence.

References

- Andrews, D. A. and Bonta, J.** (2010) *The psychology of criminal conduct* (5th ed.). Cincinnati, OH: Anderson.
- Arditti, J. A., Lambert-Shute, J. and Joest, K.** (2003) Saturday morning at the jail: implications of incarceration for families and children. *Family Relations*, 52 (3), 195–204.
- Bahr, S. J., Harker, A., Gibbs, B. G., Harris, P. E. and Fisher, J. K.** (2005) The re-entry process: how parolees adjust to release from prison. *Fathering*, 3 (3), 243–65.
- Berridge, D., Brodie, I., Pitts, J., Porteous, D. and Tarling, R.** (2001) *The independent effects of permanent exclusion from school on the offending careers of young people*, RDS Occasional Paper No 71. London: Home Office.
- Besemer, S., van der Geest, V., Murray, J., Bijleveld, C. C. J. H. and Farrington, D. P.** (2011) The Relationship between Parental Imprisonment and Offspring Offending in England and the Netherlands. *British Journal of Criminology*, 51 (2), 413–37.
- Boswell, G. and Wedge, P.** (2002) *Imprisoned fathers and their Children*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Caddle, D. and Crisp, D.** (1997) *Imprisoned women and mothers*. Home Office Research Study 162. London: Home Office.
- Cawson, P., Wattam, C., Brooker, S. and Kelly, G.** (2000). *Child maltreatment in the United Kingdom: a study of the prevalence of child abuse and neglect*. London: NSPCC. ISBN: 1842280066. Published online at: <http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/findings/childmaltreatmentintheunitedkingdom_wda48252.html> accessed February 2012.
- Dallaire, D. H.** (2007) Incarcerated mothers and fathers: a comparison of risks for children and families. *Family Relations*, 56, 440–53.
- Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and Ministry of Justice (MoJ)** (2007) *Children of Offenders Review*. London: DCSF and MoJ. Available at: <<http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/guidance/youth-justice/prevention/ChildrenofOffendersReview2007.pdf>> accessed February 2012.
- Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)** (2008) *Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusions from Schools in England 2006/07 – Amended*. Available at: <<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000793/index.shtml>> accessed February 2012.
- Department for Education (DFE)** (2007) *Children looked after by local authorities, year ending 31 March 2006* (internet only). Available at: <<http://www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/statistics/allstatistics/a00195471/children-looked-after-by-local-authorities-year-en>> accessed February 2012.
- Department for Education (DFE)** (2011) *Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusions from Schools and Exclusion Appeals in England, 2009/10*. London: DFE. Available at: <<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/sfr172011pdf.pdf>> accessed February 2012.
- Dodd, T. and Hunter, P.** (1992) *The National Prison Survey*. London: OPCS.

Dodge, M., Pogrebin, M. (2001) Collateral costs of imprisonment for women: complications of reintegration. *The Prison Journal*, 81 (1), 51–4.

Farrington, D. P. (2000) Psychosocial predictors of adult antisocial personality and adult convictions. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 18 (5), 605–22.

Glasser, M., Kolvin, I., Campbell, D. and Glasser, A. (2001) Cycle of child sexual abuse: links between being a victim and becoming a perpetrator. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 179, 482–94.

Heilbrun, K., DeMatteo, D., Fretz, R., Erickson, J., Yasuhara K. and Anumba, N. (2008) How 'Specific' are Gender-Specific Rehabilitative Needs? An Empirical Analysis. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 35 (11), 1382–97.

May, C., Sharma, N. and Stewart, D. (2008) *Factors linked to reoffending: a one-year follow-up of prisoners who took part in the Resettlement Surveys 2001, 2003 and 2004*, Ministry of Justice Research Summary 5. London: Ministry of Justice. Published online at: <<http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/factors-linked-to-reoffending.htm>> accessed February 2012.

Ministry of Justice (2009) *Reducing re-offending: supporting families, creating better futures: A Framework for improving the local delivery of support for the families of offenders*. London: Ministry of Justice. Published online at: <<http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/docs/reducing-reoffending-supporting-families.pdf>> accessed February 2012.

Ministry of Justice (2010a) *Compendium of reoffending statistics and analysis*, Ministry of Justice Statistics Bulletin. London: Ministry of Justice.

Ministry of Justice (2010b) *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders*. London: TSO (The Stationery Office).

Ministry of Justice (2010c) *Offender Management Caseload Statistics 2009*, Ministry of Justice Statistics Bulletin. London: Ministry of Justice.

Mumola, C.J. (2000) *Incarcerated Parents and their Children*, Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report. Washington DC: Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice.

Murray, J., and Farrington, D.P. (2005) Parental imprisonment: Effects on boys' antisocial behaviour and delinquency through the life-course. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 46 (12), 1269–78.

Murray, J and Farrington, D.P. (2008) The effects of parental imprisonment on children, in Tonry, M. (ed) *Crime and Justice, a review of research*, Vol. 37, pp. 133–206.

Murray, J. (2007) The cycle of punishment: Social exclusion of prisoners and their children. *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 7 (1), 55–81.

Murray, J., Janson, C.-G. and Farrington, D.P. (2007) Crime in Adult Offspring of Prisoners: A Cross-National Comparison of Two Longitudinal Samples. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 34 (1), 133–49.

Murray, J., Farrington, D. P., Sekol, I. and Olsen, R. F. (2009) Effects of parental imprisonment on child antisocial behaviour and mental health: a systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 2009:4.

Nesmith, A., and Ruhland, E. (2008) Children of incarcerated parents: Challenges and resiliency, in their own words. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30 (10), 1119–30.

Niven, S. and Olagundoye, J. (2002) *Jobs and homes – a survey of prisoners nearing release*, Home Office Findings 173. London: Home Office. Published online at: <www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/r173.pdf> accessed February 2012.

Niven, S. and Stewart, D. (2005) *Resettlement outcomes on release from prison in 2003*, Home Office Findings 248. London: Home Office. Published online at: <www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/r248.pdf> accessed February 2012.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Social Exclusion Unit) (2002) *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners* (The SEU Report). London: Social Exclusion Unit. Published online at: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social_exclusion_task_force/publications.aspx#r> accessed February 2012.

Office for National Statistics (1998) *Participation rates in Education: EU comparison, by age, 1998*.

Office for National Statistics (2003) *Population of working age: by highest qualification, spring 2003*, in *Regional Trends 38*.

Office for National Statistics (2008) *Social Trends 38*. Palgrave MacMillan. Published online at: <http://data.gov.uk/dataset/social_trends> accessed February 2012

Poehlmann, J. (2005a). Incarcerated Mothers' Contact With Children, Perceived Family Relationships, and Depressive Symptoms. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 19 (3), 350–7.

Poehlmann, J. (2005b). Representations of Attachment Relationships in Children of Incarcerated Mother. *Child Development*, 76 (3), 679–96.

Rowe, D.C. and Farrington, D.P. (1997) The familial transmission of criminal convictions. *Criminology*, 35 (1), 177–201.

Sharp, S. F., Marcus-Mendoza, S. T., Bentley, D. B., Simpson, D. B. and Love, S. R. (1997) Gender Differences in the Impact of Incarceration on the Children and Families of Drug Offenders. *Journal of the Oklahoma Criminal Justice Consortium*, 4.

Summerfield, A. (2011) *Children and Young People in Custody 2010–11*. London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons – Youth Justice Board. Available at: <<http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/publications/inspectorate-reports/hmipris/children-young%20people-2010-11.pdf>> accessed February 2012.

Withers, L. and Folsom, J. (2007) *Incarcerated Fathers: A Descriptive Analysis*, Correctional Service Canada Research Report R-186. Ottawa: Correctional Service Canada.

Ministry of Justice Research Series 4/12

**Troubled families: prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds
Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of
prisoners**

This report examines the childhood and family background of prisoners, their current family relationships, and associations between these characteristics and reoffending. It also estimates the number of children in England and Wales who experience parental imprisonment. It is based on Wave 1 of a longitudinal cohort study (Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR)). SPCR tracked the progress of newly sentenced prisoners in England and Wales.

The report finds that many prisoners came from problematic backgrounds, and that prisoners with background experiences such as having been in care, been abused, or been excluded from school, were more likely to be reconvicted than those without. The report also finds that many prisoners have children and value their families now, and see the support of their families as important in stopping them from reoffending in the future. Based on prison data and SPCR data, the report estimates that approximately 200,000 children were affected over the course of 2009 by a parent being in, or going to, prison.

ISBN 978-1-84099-544-2

© Crown copyright
Produced by the Ministry of Justice

Alternative format versions of this report are available on request.

E-mail: research@justice.gsi.gov.uk

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/research-and-analysis/moj>