



MONASH University

# Alternative realities: comparing the views of prisoners, their families and professionals on meeting children's needs

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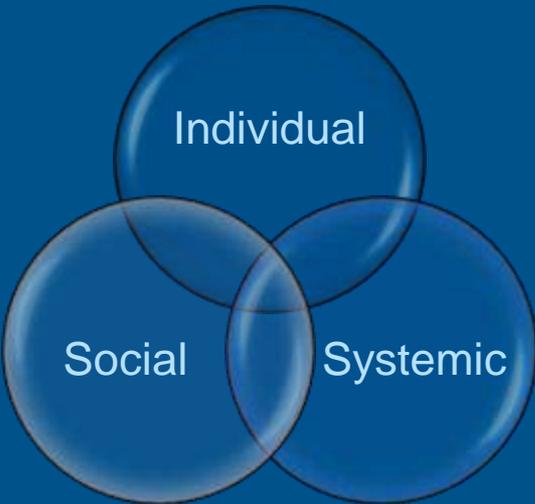


MONASH University  
Criminal Justice Research Consortium

# What do we know about current responses to children's care when their parents face imprisonment?



- **Individual:** parents often seem ill-prepared: planning is ad hoc
- **Social:** options for care are inadequate, most children cared for informally
- **Systemic:** limited time to arrange care; little oversight of care arrangements, their *quality* or their *outcomes*; no one responsible body/organisation



# This study's specific focus

- What are the current care planning practices and experiences of children and families in Victoria and New South Wales where a primary carer is imprisoned?

## *Presentation focus:*

- *What are the views of the various groups as to how we can best meet children's needs when primary carers are arrested and imprisoned?*



# Study participants



# Imprisoned parents



9 prisons:

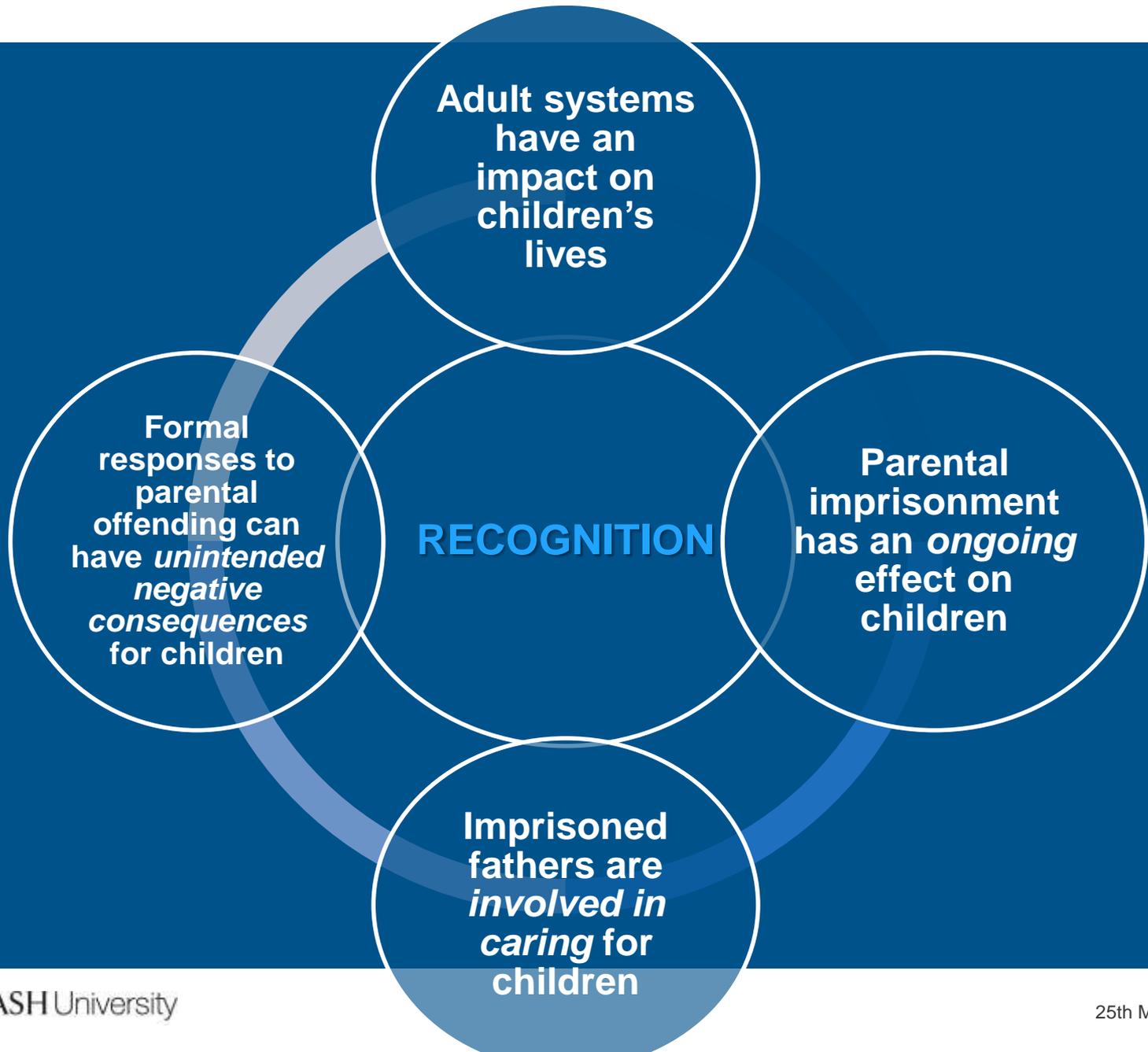
39 mothers; 17 fathers.

Caring for a total of 114 children

5 prisons:

39 mothers; 48 fathers.

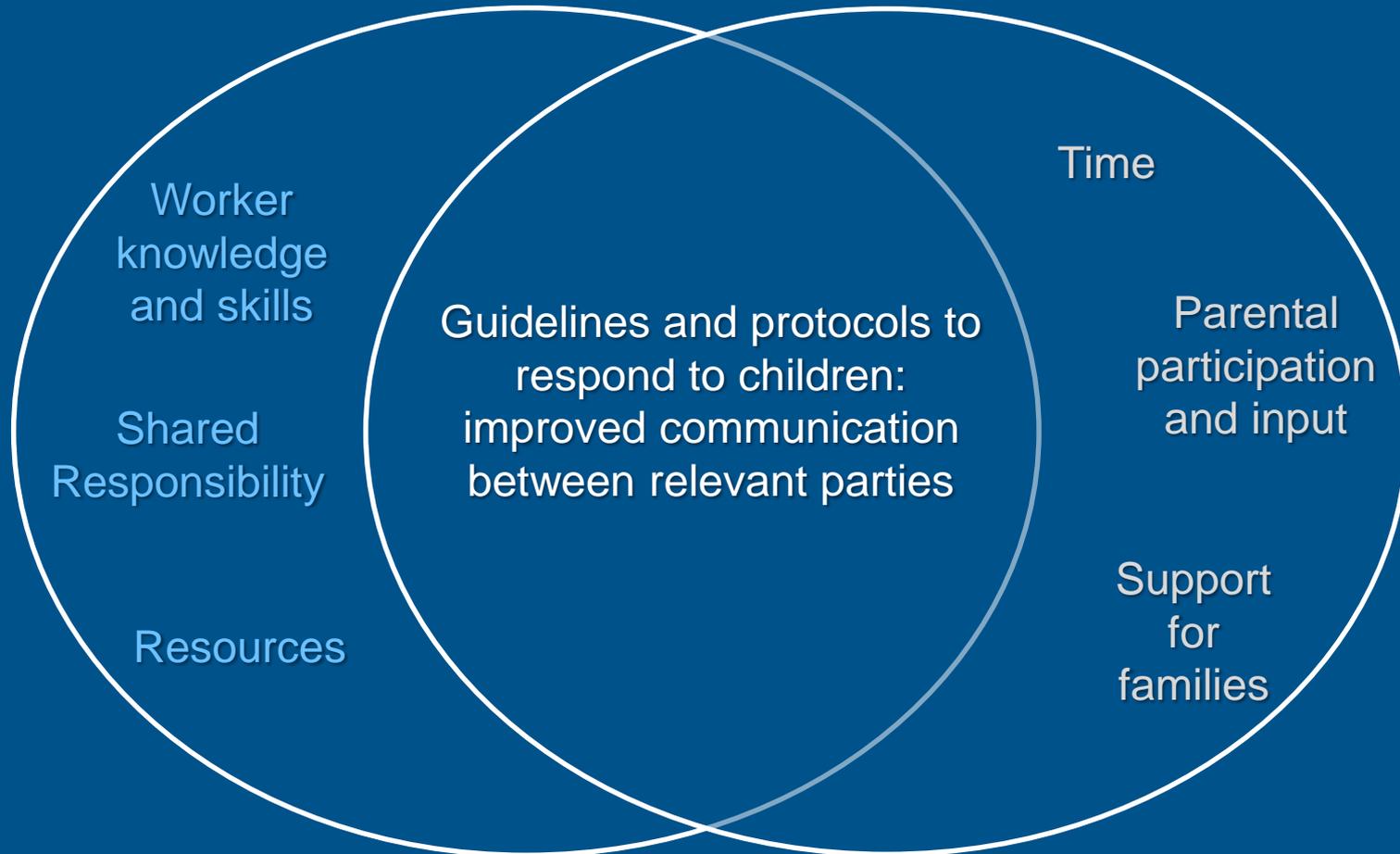
Caring for a total of 155 children.



# Needs at parental arrest

Professional stakeholders

Families



# Arrest processes: responding to children

- ❖ Guidelines and protocols in place when dealing with children: Improvements to communication needed between all parties

*“... I would have conversed with both mothers on a more frequent basis and put the child’s needs before ours ... because I think it’s wrong when two people can’t put their issues to the side and focus on the child’s best interest.” (Father, Dhurringile)*

*“No adequate **communication in the system between key actors** – something that needs to be addressed. Just need services in place to be made a formal part of the proceedings. Some sort of code of practice.” (Adult child 22, 18 at time)*



- **Period of 'limbo' after arrest**

*“Probably just my biggest issue was me **falling off the face of the earth for three weeks** when I was arrested.”  
(Father, PPP)*

*“More contact to organise care, **more face to face contact** with [my daughters].” (Father, Silverwater Men’s)*

*“Could have **let me arrange something for the kids.** Could have gotten friends to help.” (Mother, Emu Plains)*

## ❖ Time

*“I would have really liked to have been able to spend 10 minutes with the kids before the coppers [sic] dragged me away.” (Father, PPP)*

*“I wanted to go and stay there [with Uncle and Aunty] for a little bit, but I didn’t know I was going to live there ... Didn’t feel like there was any planning involved in staying with my uncle and aunty.” (Child, 12)*

***“There wasn’t any time. After she’d been arrested I got a phone call from the police saying she’d been arrested and that was it. We just had to keep looking after him.”***  
*(Grandmother, 55)*

## ❖ Parental participation and input

*“They weren’t able to be placed with family members, my mother and brothers wanted to look after the kids ... there was no plan, no case management, nothing was implemented ... my input was put aside.” (Mother, Dilwynia)*

*“Had a lot more input into it. Been given alternative situations to work with, would have been a big help.” (Father, Loddon)*

*“I couldn’t do a lot, I could have some input ... even being able to **talk to her one-on-one**, maybe try to help find a better place ... So I wish I could have had that at the beginning when everything was happening.” (Mother, DPFC)*

## ❖ More assistance offered at/after arrest: actively identifying families and children in need

*“Maybe when you come into custody **there should be somebody who asks you if you do have children and where they are and if they’re alright. If my son was at day-care – they might not have even known!**” (Father, Loddon)*

*“I think there **should have been more support, like I don’t remember anybody reaching out.**” (Adult child 26, 16 at time)*

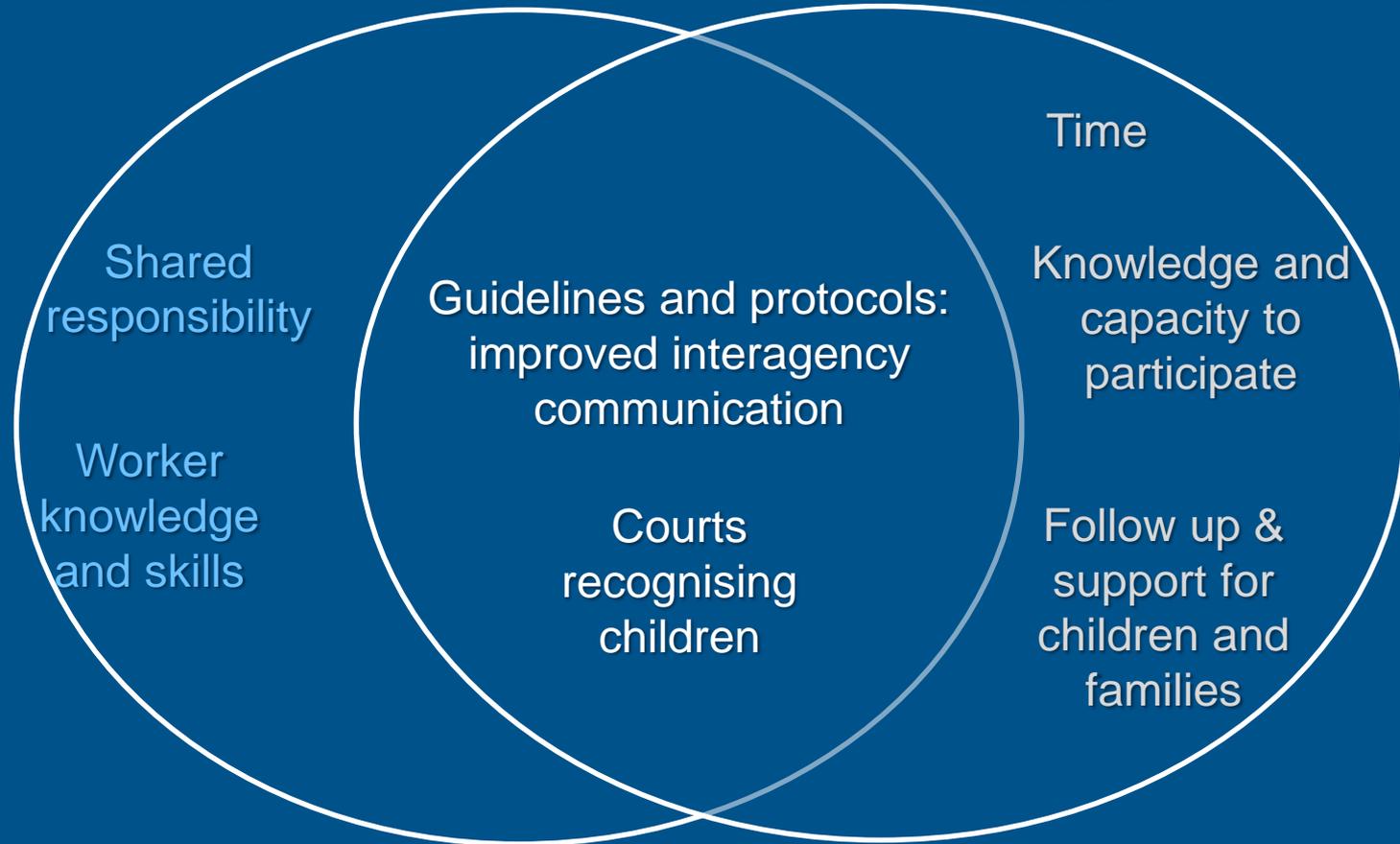
*“**Not to do it alone for a start and someone who can mentor you through it, rather than having to do it for yourself.**” (Mother, Tarrengower)*



# Needs at parental sentencing

Professional stakeholders

Families



# Sentencing

## ❖ Knowledge and capacity to participate

*“I would have been more prepared if I’d known I’d get a custodial sentence. **I would have prepared the girls more.**” (Mother, Emu Plains)*

*“At sentencing you don’t know what’s going to happen. **If I could do it again I’d try to plan, because now we’re sort of all over the place.** He’s gone to prison, you just do it now. Because of that I feel like it’s more disorganised than it could have been, could have been better.” (Child, 16)*

## ❖ Time

*“Didn’t have any time. Went to court and Magistrate remanded me. So **just having more time to make decisions.**” (Father, Loddon)*



## ❖ Guidelines and protocols: improved communication

*“It was difficult to plan because she wanted to be unrealistically optimistic, so to plan would deny her that. So it was a topic that was avoided. At that time, **the care of the child could be facilitated by a mediator [between] ... those going to gaol and those who are going to care for the child. It’s difficult to have that conversation because it’s not where their head’s at..**” (Grandfather, 57)*

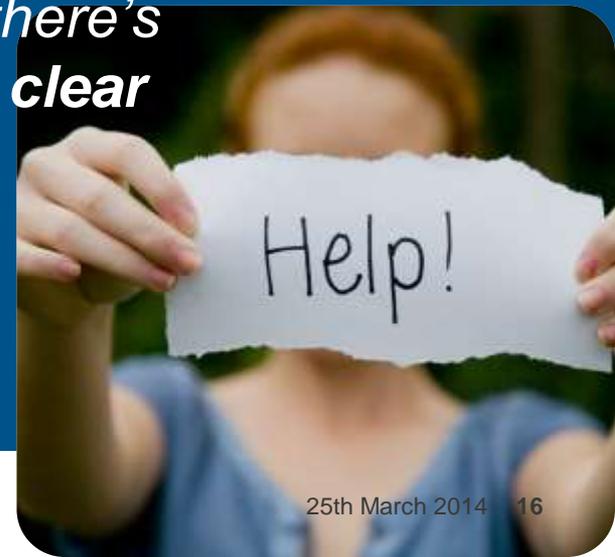
*“**There’s no support system for what happens next. None of [his] legal counsel was able to tell him what was going to happen next – it was just a hot potato.**” (Adult child 22, 18 at the time)*

## ❖ Courts recognising children

*“Went to some of it and then it got too much. **It was pretty sad and hard.** Seeing your parent over there and you can’t touch them.” (Adult child 29, 16 at the time)*

*“It’s really difficult for people who don’t have someone to look after the kids because there’s no child minding there, but **they make it clear they don’t want the kids there.**”*

*(Grandmother, 54)*



## ❖ Follow up and support for children and families

*“No one came to ask us if we were looking after her son, so if we hadn’t taken him I don’t know who would have taken him because she doesn’t have any parents and the father’s not around.”  
(Grandmother, 55)*

*“As far as court system goes – when we left the court we were gone. **There’s been no follow up with how my son’s kids are going.** There could be something in place – a social worker – to find out how they’re doing.” (Grandmother, 60)*

*“Don’t know what would happen if the kids had nobody. **Maybe there is a fail-safe that identifies kids at risk ... I couldn’t see it.** ... Do you wait for the horrors to happen, or do you be proactive?  
(Grandfather, 57)*

# Imprisonment

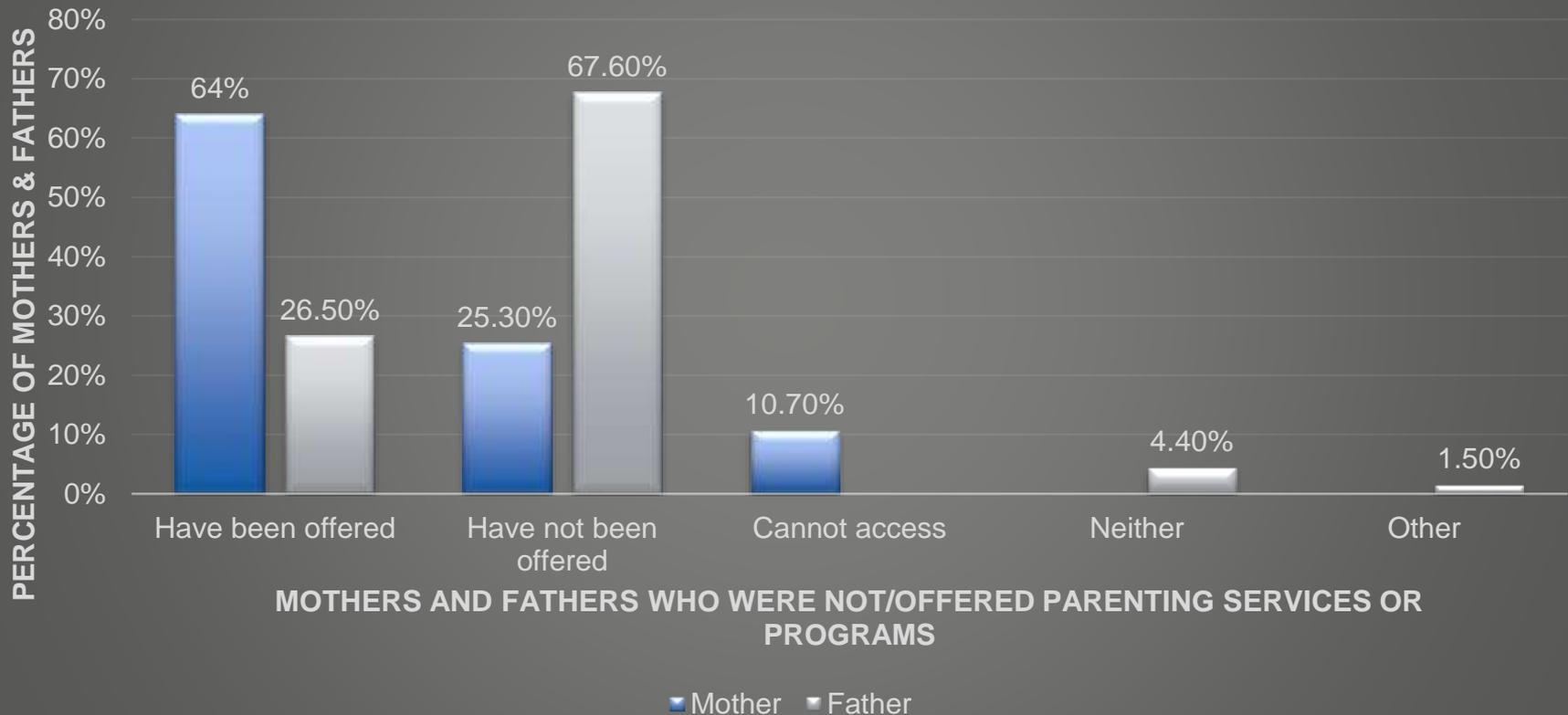
Professional stakeholders

Families



# Imprisonment

## Mothers and fathers who were not/offered parenting supports or services in prison



## ❖ Supports and services for imprisoned parents and families

- **Mothers more likely than fathers to be offered parenting supports or programs**

- **Fathers need to be *offered* parenting support/ assistance**

*“If they had something in there where parents could engage with their kids I think that would be advanced.” (Father, PPP)*

- **Carers and children need to be *offered* more supports**

*“You get more support (financially and practically) as a foster parent than a grandparent. This is due to blurred lines between grandparents who care for children because their parents work and grandparents who look after children permanently.” (Grandmother, 55)*

*“Think there should be more support systems in place. Also should make a link up with children. Some dads don't know how to express themselves (to read and write) – could have classes for expressing themselves. Should be having parenting programs. This is a working prison – should be working towards parenting and family. Building blocks for life ... If I'm feeling the way I'm feeling and my wife's feeling the way she's feeling, imagine how they are feeling!” (Father, Loddon)*





# What is needed?

- Guidelines in place to respond to children at arrest and sentencing
- Protocols that would improve communication between key agencies and with families
- Time and opportunities for parents/families to make preparations and participate in decision making about children and their care
- Follow up and ongoing for children and families
- Parenting support for imprisoned parents – including fathers

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VACRO



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SHINE for Kids



Prison Fellowship



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Victoria Police



NSW Police Force

Dept. of Education and Early  
Childhood Development - Victoria

Dept. of Education and Communities –  
NSW



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