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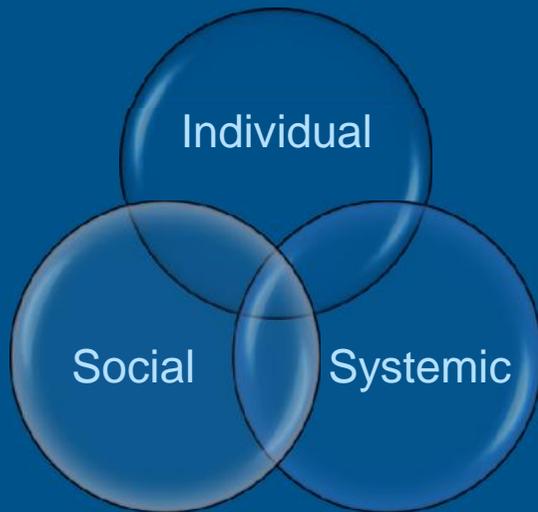
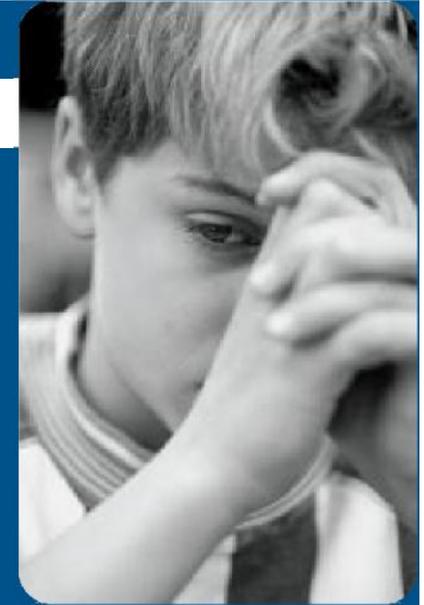
Families reconnecting after the imprisonment of a primary carer: champions and challenges

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What do we know about dependent children after their parent/carer is released from prison?



- **Individual:** parents often seem ill-prepared for release
- **Social:** extended families caring for children are largely unsupported; carer-parent relationships are often acrimonious
- **Systemic:** pre-release planning does not have a family orientation

Family reunification after imprisonment

- Little formal knowledge
 - Research has reported on parents' 'plans to reunify'
 - Research has focused on mothers
- Reunification: what works?
 - Direct caring role pre-prison
 - Ongoing contact
 - Parent-carer relationship
 - Parents without chronic substance use



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

- *To outline how care of children is considered and managed post release with gaps highlighted and solutions offered.*



Study participants



Pre-release preparation: community

Pre-release services for returning home

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	None	21	3.9	75.0	75.0
	Psychiatric services	1	.2	3.6	78.6
	WISP worker	1	.2	3.6	82.1
	TAP programs	4	.7	14.3	96.4
	Transition Centre	1	.2	3.6	100.0
	Total	28	5.2	100.0	

“\$300 and that was it and the clothes on my back and walk out the door and you’re done” (VIC father)

“None, there was a counsellor that you can talk to, but nothing else relating to housing, employment. I struggled towards my release date. I hadn’t seen my husband and was worried things would be different. Like were we going to be different? Would we stay together? There was no preparation before I left”. (NSW mother)

Pre-release preparation: family

90% report no preparation to reconnect with family

“None at all. Just basically come home and slip back into the role again.” (VIC father)

“No not really, have a general program that deals with expectations... it would be beneficial for the family to have information too.” (VIC mother)

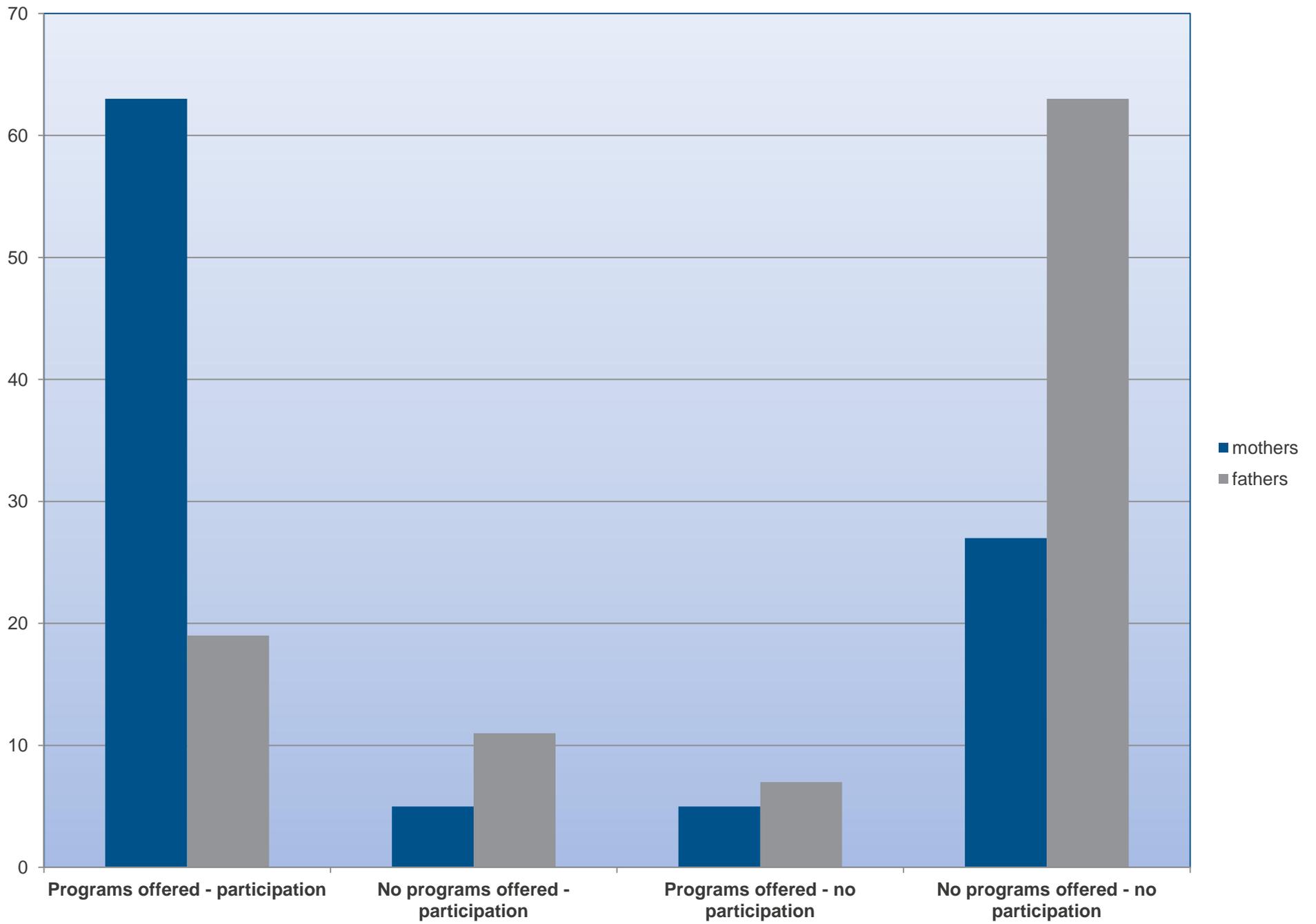
“On release, it’s all about parole” (VIC mother)



Programs provided in prison to support parenting

Parenting_services_prison				
		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Parenting_services_prison ^a	Group parent education	15	20.0%	23.4%
	Family support worker	9	12.0%	14.1%
	Counselling re: parenting	1	1.3%	1.6%
	Video visits	1	1.3%	1.6%
	none	34	45.3%	53.1%
	Prison network ministeries	3	4.0%	4.7%
	Psychiatric nurses	1	1.3%	1.6%
	Mother baby unit	1	1.3%	1.6%
	Tweedle	2	2.7%	3.1%
	SHINE	6	8.0%	9.4%
	DHS	1	1.3%	1.6%
	School holidays	1	1.3%	1.6%
	Total	75	100.0%	117.2%

a. Group



Pre-release support

Families

My
parents ...

My
mother...

My
sister...

My
partner...



Challenges to family reconnection

Anything that made this process harder?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Lack of support	2	.4	20.0	20.0
	Contact	2	.4	20.0	40.0
	Time	1	.2	10.0	50.0
	money	2	.4	20.0	70.0
	Lack of services	1	.2	10.0	80.0
	Being away from my children	2	.4	20.0	100.0
	Total	10	1.9	100.0	

Stakeholder views: organisational challenges

- Timing and location of parenting capacity assessments where there are Child Protection concerns
- Limited inter-agency communication and sharing of information at the point of release – making reunification a lengthy process

“You can only assess somebody who is out and who is functioning as an adult in the community before you can start considering them as a suitable carer and a suitable parent.”
(CP NSW-urban)

Parental challenges: parole issues

- Considerable parole requirements for parents, combined with limited knowledge of the process
- Children can be 'used' as a tool in getting parole

"I don't know, we don't really communicate very well so you've got to do all these things that the prison's telling you to do or your parole officer or whatever and then we're saying and you need to do this, this, this, this and this before we even consider giving your children back." (Foster Care Regional Victoria)

Housing issues

“So you’re not going to be able to show that you can have a kid if you don’t have a house and you certainly if you don’t have a bed.” (Legal Service – NSW urban)

- Limited access to suitable and stable accommodation upon release
- Key role of accommodation/“an address’ in getting parole and the care of their children
- Management of rent whilst incarcerated

“And sometimes I’ve had experiences where women are housed in St Kilda when they start using again, get back into the street prostitution and they’re almost setting people up to fail in a sense but that’s the only place you can get accommodation.” (Justice interest group VIC)

Stable prison routine vs unstable community life

- Stability/containment provided by prison
- The parent's focus may not be on the child when exiting prison
- Some fathers maintain contact while they're incarcerated, however this can be short lived when back in the community



“I don't know that many have the conversation about how you come back into a place where the gaps have closed, where you don't have a role now, you've got to re-establish yourself and your credibility within that. (NGOs VIC)

Where is the voice of the child? Reflections from professionals

- How do you restore attachment between a parent and a child who has been in the care of a grandparent for 18 months?
- Issues within the family have not necessarily been resolved, meaning further trauma and disruption for children
- There are a growing number of women who die within weeks of release, leaving children behind. This is not being acknowledged.
- Children in foster/kinship care have false expectations that things will be different





Ways forward

- 'See' and respond to imprisoned people as parents
- Men are fathers
- Parenting support/programs need to equip people for their post-release roles
- Focus on transition
- Post release support for families

Acknowledgements: Research collaborators

Partner organisations:

Department of Justice –
Victoria

Department of Human
Services – Victoria



VACRO



Commission for Children and
Young People



SHINE for Kids



Prison Fellowship



Supporting organisations:

Dept. of Corrective Services - NSW

Victoria Police



NSW Police Force

Dept. of Education and Early
Childhood Development - Victoria

Dept. of Education and Communities –
NSW