THAMES VALLEY VIOLENCE PREVENTION PARTNERSHIP

WHAT WORKS

Operation Paramount

Natural Experiment comparing areas where Operation Paramount implemented, to those in which it was not active at the time

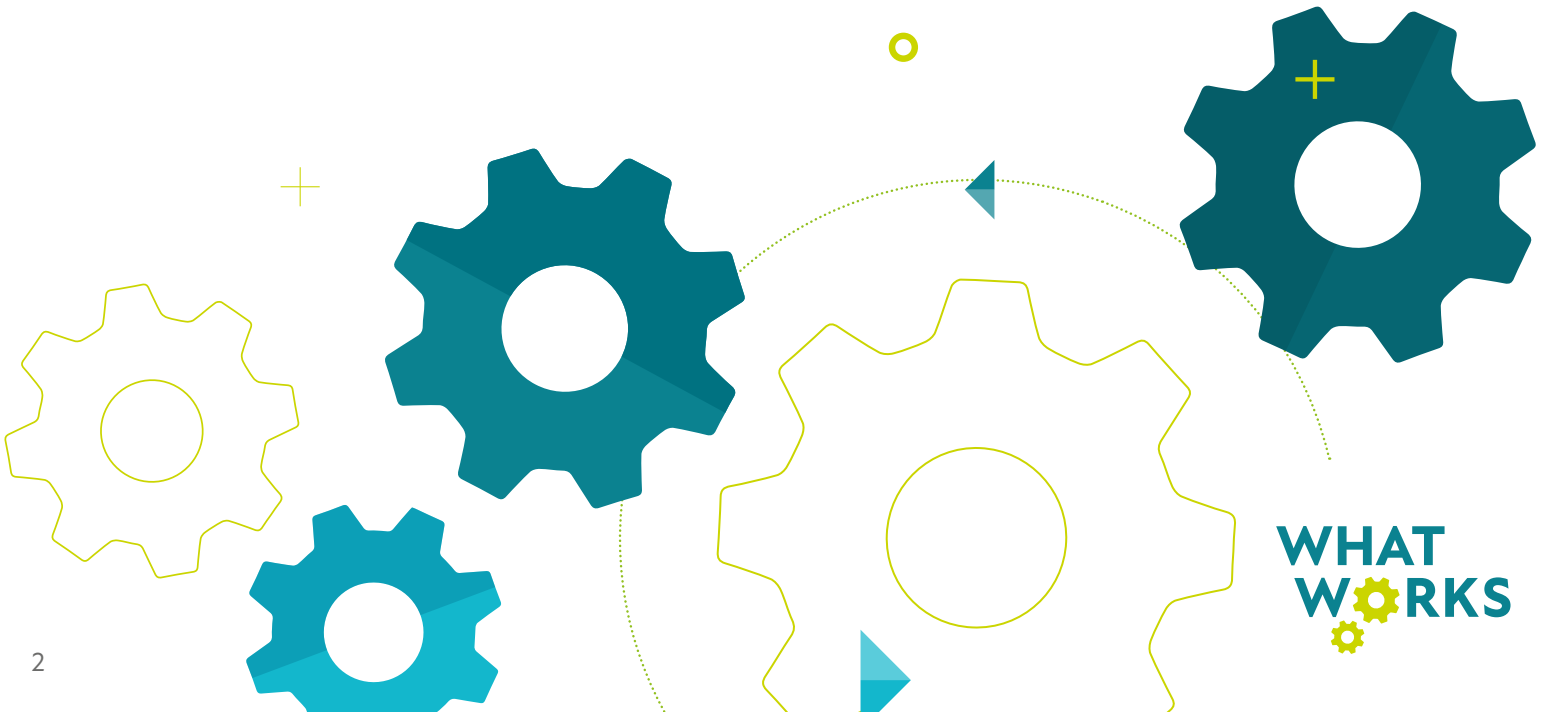
Descriptive multi-methods analysis of children affected by parental imprisonment and the people who care for them between 2021 and 2024

Date of publication: April 2025

What is the What Works Series?

Welcome to Thames Valley Violence Prevention Partnership's "**What Works**" series; a collection of publications which present the results from our intervention evaluations and relevant pieces of research.

- A key role of the Violence Prevention Partnership programme is to invest our Home Office grant into the testing of new intervention approaches; funding not only their delivery in our local areas but to run robust evaluations of those interventions, adding to the evidence base around what works in preventing violence.
- We aim to gather evidence on the effectiveness and impact of interventions in preventing or reducing violence. That evidence is then played back to our local partnership systems to provide learning, and to inform the system change that is needed if we are to shift our focus towards higher impact intervention and diversion approaches.
- Our evaluations and research also contribute to a growing national evidence base, through formal academic publication and sharing with bodies such as the Youth Endowment Fund and the wider network of Violence Reduction Units (VRUs).
- Each of our interventions has been through a rigorous research and design phase, using our Research Project Lifecycle which puts in place a structure around which the highest quality of research projects can be designed and run. The Lifecycle ensures that interventions are based on quality ideas, knowledge of the existing evidence, analysis of data relating to cohort design and expected caseload, and well-documented design decisions. This ensures that the way that we implement and deliver the intervention is consistent, and enables us to deliver the right test of an intervention that is based on evidence, and that can actually be implemented in the real world. This also allows us to run multiple concurrent Randomised Control Trials (RCT), the gold standard approach to determining what works.
- Through the Thames Valley "What Works" series of publications, we provide all our partners with an accessible, yet complete, summary of key findings from our research. We aim to identify next steps and to assist in identifying how the learning could be applied to wider local services, to support that longer term, sustainable approach to preventing and reducing violence in our communities.
- For clarity, this is our local approach and is separate to other "what works" approaches being undertaken by other bodies, such as the Youth Endowment Fund. Although we will be sharing our evaluations accordingly to contribute to the wider evidence base.



Introduction

Thames Valley Police and Thames Valley Violence Prevention Partnership (formerly VRU) jointly launched Operation Paramount in the winter of 2021. Operation Paramount is the first statutory data-led recognition system for children affected by parental imprisonment.

It accesses reception data from prisons across England and Wales and analyses it against other statutory systems within a secure data environment to discover parental links to children within the Thames Valley. These children are then offered support by a police officer as part of Operation Paramount, via their remaining parent/carer, from the charity Children Heard and Seen.

Parental imprisonment is a recognised Adverse Childhood Experience, but its impact on children is widely unknown, largely due to a previous inability to identify those affected.

This is a multi-methods approach to research, using the fact that implementation was limited to one county in Thames Valley to permit analysis as a qualitative natural experiment. Data relating to families recognised as part of Operation Paramount were examined to identify themes within the data that could improve provision of services. Phone conversations with the remaining parent/carer then identified more information that was quantitatively analysed and allowed offers of support to be made to all families involved in the research. Their consent was requested to take part in telephone interviews where the family experience of parental incarceration was explored in more detail.

This multi-methods approach aimed to answer the following questions:

- **What can we learn from Operation Paramount identification data about the families affected by parental incarceration?**
- **Are there differences between families who were eligible for Operation Paramount and those that were not, due to where the programme had been rolled out?**
- **Using interviews, what was the experience of families who have experienced parental incarceration, and was there any perceptible difference between families who were eligible for an Operation Paramount visit and those who had not been?**

The authors are mindful of the importance of language in reducing stigma and demonstrating the intentions of this research, namely to improve support for all children with a parent in prison. The nature of this research is partly quantitative, and therefore we have referred to the *identification* of children and families where it pertains to data systems and processes. This is not done lightly, and where referring to individual children and families we recommend the use of less statutory language such as the *recognition* of children and families.

This analysis has not been conducted with any intention to suggest future outcomes for children. It is intended purely to shine a light on some of the challenges children and families face following the imprisonment of a parent, with the aim of assisting ongoing efforts to support all children with a parent in prison.

WHAT WORKS

Key findings Summary

Descriptive Findings of children affected by parental incarceration

When a male parent is incarcerated then it is very likely that the mother will remain the carer, but when a female parent is incarcerated, it is very unlikely that the remaining carer will be the mother or father, it will likely be someone else.

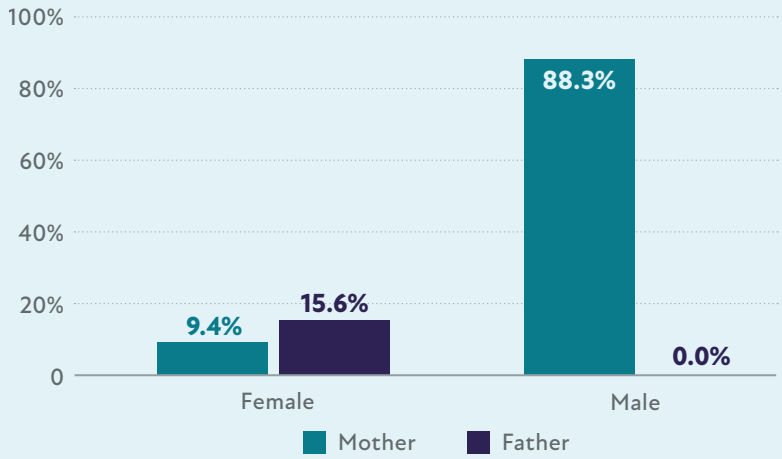


Figure 1. Percentage of children whose remaining carer is the mother or father, broken down by gender of the incarcerated parent

Children are much more likely to become Children We Care For (CWCF – in care of the state), or of a special guardian if the parent who has gone to prison is female.

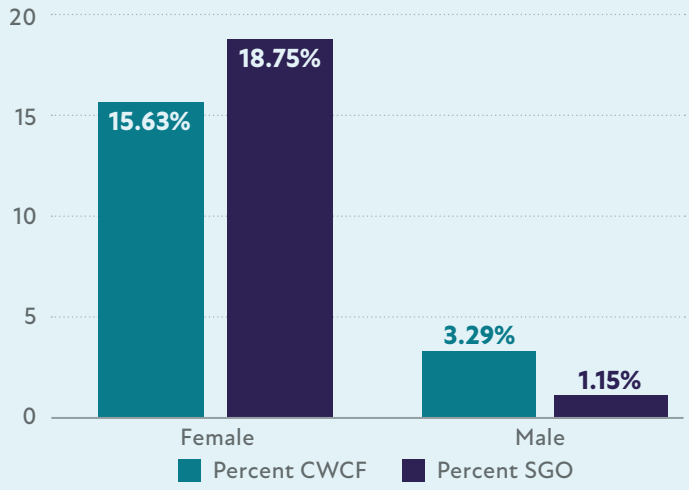


Figure 2. Percentage of children who go into state care (CWCF) or subject to a Special Guardianship Order (SGO), broken down by the gender of the incarcerated parent

Quantitative Findings from Natural Experiment

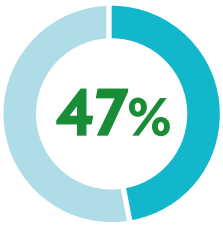
of families did not have contact with the incarcerated parent and saw this as positive.

20% of families who were eligible for Operation Paramount went on to access support from Children Heard and Seen, compared with 13% in areas where Operation Paramount was not live.

BUT... when offered again at a later date, **2/3 of the cohort** that were phoned either had support or asked to be referred for support from Children Heard and Seen.

Whilst the initial offer of support did not get taken up by many, it still appears to have benefitted some families who would not otherwise have received support. It is worth testing whether an additional offer should be made at a later date.

When asked what types of support would help:



specified support for their child(ren)

specified support for the remaining parent or carer

specified legal support

WHAT WORKS

Findings from the Natural Experiment Interviews

Contact with the offending parent and their family

- Incarceration often leads to severed or limited contact between parents and their children, especially when there are safety concerns from the parent, or negative impacts from the prison environment.
- Some caregivers choose to cut off contact with the incarcerated parent for the child's well-being.
- Some maintain connections with extended family members to provide stability and a sense of belonging.

Key messages

- Offer support to mothers and other carers in navigating decisions about parental contact.
- Focus on child well-being through assessing the impact of contact with the incarcerated parent.
- Encourage positive extended family connections, such as grandparents, for emotional support.

Mothers and carers managing the fallout

- Mothers and other carers show resilience despite facing significant challenges.
- While the mothers often handle everything on their own, this can lead to feelings of isolation, and emotional strain.
- The pressure to "just get on with it" can be empowering but also prevent personal emotional healing.
- Mothers and other carers had concerns about the long-term impact on their children.

Recommendations

- Acknowledge the emotional considerations in the situation, and ensure mothers don't feel they must cope alone.
- Provide emotional support through counselling and peer group support.
- Enhance systemic support so services are more accessible and reduce feelings of isolation.

Supporting the children

- Mothers and carers face challenges in communicating with their children about an incarcerated parent, balancing the need to protect children from distress while being honest about the situation.
- Younger children are often shielded from the truth, while mothers and other carers take a responsive approach to older children and teens' questions.
- The difficulty increases when managing children of different ages or with special needs.
- Mothers and other carers wanted professional guidance in how to best communicate the situation with their children.
- The incarceration also leads to shifts in family dynamics, causing emotional and behavioural challenges for children.
- There is a need for better support services to help children process these experiences.

Recommendations

- Provide professional guidance to help families navigate difficult conversations with children.
- Tailor communication approaches to the child's age, needs, and developmental stage.
- Offer support services for children to help with emotional and behavioural challenges, especially through schools and external services.

Support from family

- Mothers and other carers had mixed experiences with extended family support.
- In some cases, extended family provided crucial emotional and practical help, reducing the need for agency involvement.
- For others, family members were unsupportive or even harmful, either ignoring the impact of the incarcerated parent's actions or sabotaging the mother's efforts to rebuild family life.
- This lack of support or manipulation can add significant emotional distress to an already challenging situation.

Recommendations

- Encourage positive family involvement by promoting the role of supportive extended family in helping mothers and other carers.
- Provide alternative support networks for families lacking extended family support, such as peer support groups.

School: a consistent, and largely positive, presence

- Schools play a key role in supporting children of incarcerated parents, providing emotional and academic support.
- Many families reported positive experiences, but frustrations arose when schools didn't offer enough concrete help for the child.
- There can be a lack of joined up thinking i.e. when behavioural issues led to exclusions.

Recommendations

- Training for school staff to better support children of incarcerated parents.
- Offer concrete support for children who experience parental incarceration such as counselling or dedicated pastoral support.
- Address behavioural issues holistically to avoid exclusions.
- School policies should be developed to help create a supportive school environment where stigma is reduced and safe and supportive spaces are provided.

Work: challenges and benefits

- A few mothers and other carers mentioned work, noting that flexible and understanding employers helped reduce stress within a difficult situation.
- However, when children faced difficulties, such as poor school attendance, some had to stop working to focus on their child's needs, adding financial strain.

Recommendations

- Encourage flexible work arrangements to support parents balancing work and caregiving.
- Offer financial assistance to families facing financial strain due to caregiving challenges as a result of parental incarceration.

The scarcity of therapeutic support for mothers and other carers, and children

- While a few mothers, other carers and children received some support, such as counselling and mentorship, there is a significant gap in ongoing therapeutic support for families impacted by parental incarceration.
- There is generational trauma, with mothers navigating their emotional struggles while supporting children with their own trauma.
- Many mothers and other carers, especially of teens, expressed a need for specialised emotional support for their children.

Recommendations

- Increase access to therapy for both adults and children to address trauma.
- Provide tailored support for children that aligns with their developmental stage and specific needs.

The criminal justice system: a mixed picture

- Families with legal orders generally had positive experiences with police.
- However, some felt unresponsive police actions and lack of follow-up left them unsupported.
- Fear, distrust, and past negative experiences could lead to reluctance to involve the police.
- The criminal justice process was slow, sometimes leaving mothers and other carers to manage the risk surrounding the offending parent's presence.
- A lack of information on release dates caused anxiety for mothers and other carers.

Recommendations

- Ensure Police follow-up and clear communication of next steps.
- Provide information about criminal justice processes and release dates.

Social services: a complex and strained relationship

- Families had mixed experiences with social services.
- While social workers responded promptly to immediate risks, they did not provide longer-term support for emotional, practical, or psychological needs once the immediate danger was addressed.
- Some mothers felt judged rather than assisted.

Recommendations

- Provide longer-term support beyond immediate crisis intervention, including emotional and psychological assistance for family members.

Third sector support

- Refuge support was crucial for mothers experiencing domestic violence, with charities such as SAFE offering valuable court process assistance.
- Many mothers and other carers took up the Operation Paramount pathway for legal support i.e. regarding parental responsibility.
- The timing of this offer is important; mothers in crisis may benefit from re-offers later.
- Some families declined services to avoid normalising parental imprisonment for their children.

Recommendations

- Re-offer support such as Operation Paramount when families are ready.

Methodology

Operation Paramount was started in Thames Valley in winter of 2021, as the UK's first statutory data-led recognition system for children affected by parental imprisonment. Thames Valley is therefore the only area of the country that has data relating to children who were recognised in this manner, to be able to identify what was known about them and what provision was in place.

Implementation of Operation Paramount commenced in Oxfordshire, simply due to the operational area of the officers who worked to identify these families, and it has since been rolled out more widely. The limiting of the area of roll-out due to chance has allowed comparison between families from different areas of Thames Valley where data has recognised parental incarceration as part of a natural experiment.

It was determined that there was no other area that had a cohort of children who had been recognised at the time of their parent's incarceration, and that we did not know a lot about families this had occurred within; we did not know whether a police officer reaching out and offering support had changed anything for the families that had been eligible for Operation Paramount.

Operation Paramount was first piloted in 2021 with a focus on Oxford city, before rolling out across all of Oxfordshire by summer 2022. In December 2022 Operation Paramount commenced in Milton Keynes, and went live across Buckinghamshire and West Berkshire in July 2023. Bracknell Forest and Reading went live in July 2024 and it is planned to be Thames Valley-wide by the summer of 2025.

Due to the way in which Operation Paramount had been developed and rolled out, it had been available in Oxfordshire before it was available in other areas. Therefore it was possible to identify families from elsewhere in the Thames Valley who would have been eligible had they been in Oxfordshire, from the same time period. A natural experiment was developed to attempt to learn about the experiences of the families affected by parental incarceration and the potential benefits of the Operation Paramount pathway.

This research was a multi-methods study aimed at learning more about the cohort of families who experience parental incarceration. First, data was extracted from the Operation Paramount identification dataset for all families that had been eligible for Operation Paramount since it began in Winter 2021, and this data was examined descriptively to identify themes in the data.

Families were then identified within Operation Paramount identification data where one parent had been incarcerated between 1st July 2022 and 30th June 2024 for all areas of the Thames Valley, and where the incarcerated parent was still in custody. This identified a cohort of 85 families to attempt contact by telephone, of which 35 were contactable, to ask whether they would take part in an interview. From this, 11 carers were interviewed via telephone. Information from the initial phone calls was then coded and analysed for quantitative analysis, and the interviews were analysed thematically to examine the impact of parental incarceration in more detail, in terms of how it had impacted the families over time.

This multi-methods approach aimed to answer the following questions:

- **What can we learn from Operation Paramount identification data about the families affected by parental incarceration?**
- **Are there differences between families who were eligible for Operation Paramount and those that were not, due to where the programme had been rolled out?**
- **Using interviews, what was the experience of families who have experienced parental incarceration, and was there any perceptible difference between families who were eligible for an Operation Paramount visit and those who had not been?**

All families who were contacted as part of this research, whether originally eligible for Operation Paramount or not, were offered support from Children Heard and Seen, a charity who provide children who have been affected by parental incarceration with significant and much needed support. This ensured that no family would be disadvantaged by taking part in this research.

The second and third stage, where personal contact was made with individuals, was approved by Oxford Brookes University Ethics Committee October 2024, ref no: 241845.

Findings

Descriptive Findings of children affected by parental incarceration

Age of children

Figure 3 shows the ages of the children who were recognised as being affected by parental incarceration. There is a spread of ages, but it appears there are more primary to early secondary school age children in the cohort than other ages.

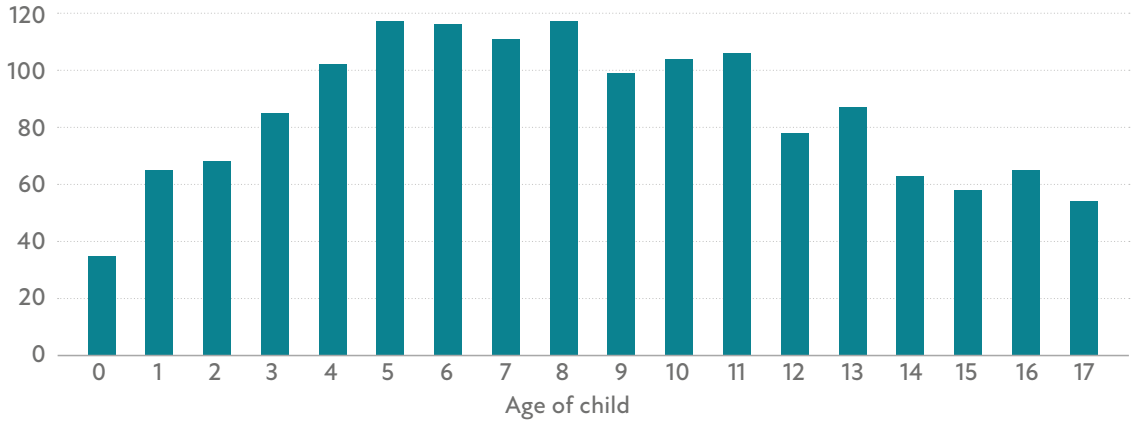


Figure 3. Count of children recognised as being affected by parental incarceration, by age of child

Gender differences in who becomes the carer

Whilst it is much less common for the mother to be the parent that is incarcerated, with this being the case in 5.01% of cases (32 out of 607) that were identified for contact as part of Operation Paramount, there were some major differences in who remains as the carer in cases where mothers and fathers have gone to prison. As can be seen in Figure 4 below, when a male parent is incarcerated then it is very likely that the mother will remain the carer. However, when a female parent is incarcerated, it is very unlikely that the remaining carer will be the mother or father, and it will likely be someone else. This is a statistically significant difference in outcomes, and the data relating to this comparison can be found in Appendix B.

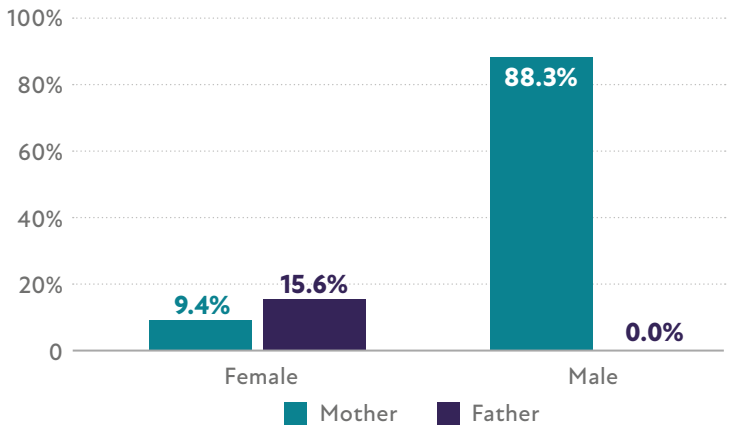


Figure 4. Percentage of children whose remaining carer is the mother or father, broken down by gender of the incarcerated parent

In addition, Figure 5 below shows the percentage of children who then go on to become a Child We Care For (in state care under the Children Act, 2004), or subject to special guardianship orders (SGO), broken down by gender of the incarcerated parent. When a female parent is the one who is incarcerated, the child is much more likely to become a Child We Care For (CWCF), or to become subject to a special guardianship order. Both of these are statistically significant differences, and a table showing the data for these comparisons can be found in Appendix B.

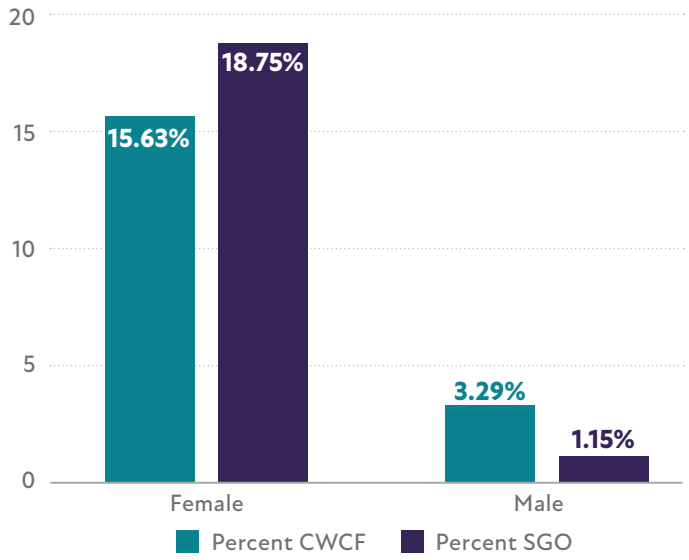


Figure 5. Percentage of children who go into state care (CWCF) or subject to a Special Guardianship Order (SGO), broken down by the gender of the incarcerated parent

However, while it is the case that a much higher percentage of children become a CWCF, or subject to an SGO when a female parent goes to prison, the overall number of such children is still higher relating to a male parent going to prison, simply due to the fact that 95% of the parents who were incarcerated were male.

Data Findings from the Natural Experiment

Out of the families who would have been eligible for Operation Paramount, there were 35 families where the imprisoned parent was still in custody at the time of the follow-up and who it had been possible to contact for a phone call to offer an interview and to offer support. Twenty of these were cases from Oxfordshire where the police visit had been attempted and Operation Paramount was delivered, the treatment group for the natural experiment, and fifteen were cases from other areas where Operation Paramount had not been in place at the time of the incarceration.

Contact with the incarcerated parent

During the phone call that was delivered to all during the natural experiment, the carer was asked whether they have contact with the incarcerated parent: the father in all of these cases. Figure 6 below shows that the vast majority (24 out of 35, or 68.6%) did not have contact with the incarcerated parent and saw that as positive. Whilst 26 out of 35 did not want contact with the incarcerated parent, only 5 had a court order in place on release.

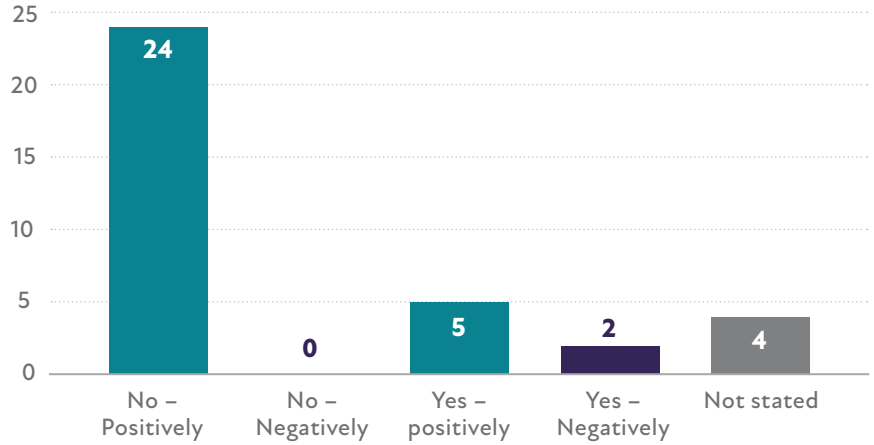


Figure 6. Count of response to whether there was contact with the incarcerated parent, and whether this contact, or lack thereof, is seen positively or negatively

Uptake of support offer from Children Heard and Seen before this trial

Only four of the twenty families that were eligible for the natural experiment had taken up support from Children Heard and Seen following the initial Operation Paramount delivery. This does show that it is an effective mechanism for some people to be referred into support, as this is a higher percentage than that in the control group, where two families had a referral through the child's school. This is shown in Figures 7 and 8 below.

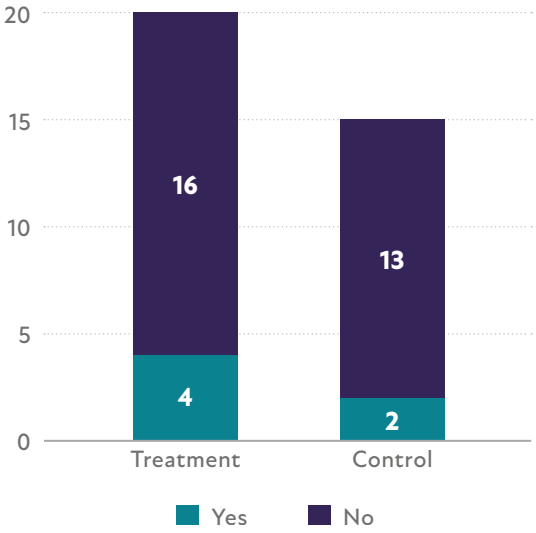


Figure 7. Uptake of Children Heard and Seen Support originally, broken down by treatment and control group

Uptake of CHaS Support	Treatment	Control
Yes	4	2
No	16	13
Percentage with CHaS Support	20%	13%

Figure 8. Uptake of Children Heard and Seen (CHaS) Support originally, broken down by treatment and control group

Acceptance of support referrals on follow-up call

Every member of both groups was offered a referral for support from Children Heard and Seen as part of the initial phone call made during the follow-up stage of the natural experiment. Figure 9 shows the desire for support offers at this stage is much higher than the uptake of support offers in the original referral when Operation Paramount was delivered. In addition, two people who had previously been supported by Children Heard and Seen asked for a re-referral at this point. Only a third did not want support at this follow-up stage.

Accepted CHaS referral with this contact	Treatment	Control	Total	Percentage
Yes	11	6	17	49%
Yes, as re-referral having accepted CHaS support before	2	0	2	6%
No	5	7	12	34%
Already accepted CHaS Support	1	2	3	9%
Not Applicable (child now over 18, but had support previously)	1	0	1	3%
Grand Total	20	15	35	100%

Figure 9. Count of responses to support offer being made over the phone as part of the follow-up evaluation

Reasons for accepting support offer at this stage

When offered support during the initial phone call that was placed to all eligible families, the carers that asked for a referral were also asked how they felt it could help them, and the reasons given were: support for child, support for self, or support with legal difficulties. The counts of each of these reasons are shown in Figure 10 below.

Reason Given	Yes	No	Percentage Yes
Support for Child	9	10	47.37%
Support for Self	6	13	31.58%
Legal	4	15	21.05%

Figure 10. Count of carers giving different reasons for referral for support

Entry into interview stage

Finally, as part of the phone call, a request was made for them to participate in an interview where more in-depth information would be drawn out about their experiences. Figure 11 below shows the level of agreement to take part in interviews, and then how many went on to actually complete the interview.

Description	Treatment	Control	Total
Agreed to be contacted for interview	14	10	24
Did not agree to be contacted for interview	6	5	11
Completed interview	6	5	11

Figure 11. Count of initial consent for referral for interview, and actual interview completion, broken down by group

These eleven carers then went on to take part in a qualitative interview, the results of which are detailed in the next section.

Interview Findings from Natural Experiment

Survival and support: the experience of mothers and carers for children where there is an incarcerated parent

The mothers and other carers in this study demonstrated a high level of resilience in very challenging circumstances. For all, the incarceration of the offending parent was often one event in a long history of domestic abuse, drug use, or child abuse. The mothers had to navigate a worsening situation over time; and the eventual drawn-out judiciary process often meant the offending parent remained present with associated risk to the family. This analysis will commence with a brief consideration of contact with the offending parent and their extended family, followed by observations on the significant work on the part of the mother or carer to mitigate risk to the children and herself, and manage evolving circumstances. It will then consider the impact on the children, both immediate and developmental. The role of immediate support resources such as family, school, work, and non-statutory support such as therapy and charity, will then be considered; followed by that of statutory organisations – the police, the criminal justice system, and social care.

Contact with the offending parent and their family

> *'We don't have any communication or nothing. I've actually got an injunction out on him from years ago. Basically, so he can't come near me...'*

For most families, the incarcerated parent is no longer actively involved in their children's lives. For those who had domestic violence issues with the incarcerated parent, no contact is preferred, due to safety concerns. With regard to prison contact, some mothers and other carers took the child(ren) initially, however expressed regret for doing this due to the negative impact of the prison environment on the child(ren). Several mothers and other carers said that they made a deliberate choice to cut off or limit contact with the incarcerated parent, believing it was in the best interest of the child:

> *'I did take her for a little while, then she got older and realised what it was and then I wouldn't take her, I refused to. It's not the right environment for a young child.'*

While the relationship with the offending parent is often severed, on occasion there was still some effort to maintain connections with the extended family, such as grandparents. This was seen as important for maintaining a sense of family and belonging for the child:

> *'She gets to see her father's mum who is nanny. Every two weeks on the Sunday she goes there from 12 until 5pm and she gets to see other members of the family at the same time. That's something that we've kept going because it's important to have a relationship with the other side of the family.'*

Summary

- Incarceration often leads to severed or limited contact between parents and their children, especially when there are safety concerns from the parent, or negative impacts from the prison environment.
- Some caregivers choose to cut off contact with the incarcerated parent for the child's well-being.
- Some maintain connections with extended family members to provide stability and a sense of belonging.

Key messages

- Offer support to mothers and other carers in navigating decisions about parental contact.
- Focus on child well-being through assessing the impact of contact with the incarcerated parent.
- Encourage positive extended family connections such as grandparents for emotional support.

Mothers and carers managing the fallout

Despite significant struggles, there's a sense of resilience present in many of the mothers' and carers' accounts. Mothers express a strong desire to provide stability for their children, even when they're dealing with emotional and practical challenges themselves:

> ***'To be honest I think I've just taken it all in my stride, I get everything done when it needs to be done, the kids are happy and healthy.'***

The mothers and other carers are often the central figures in managing everything related to the children, school, police, social services, the incarcerated parent etc. While support from family and services can be available, there is still significant work and responsibility for the mother/carer. One mother said that, although her sisters were there for her, she still felt like she was doing it "on my own." There was a strong desire to move on from the trauma, especially for the children's sake. The internal conflict of trying to "move on" while still carrying the emotional burden highlights the difficulty of processing trauma when external demands take precedence:

> ***'There are some good moments and there are some bad days. I won't lie. I'm still struggling. I do cope with things, because I have 6 children and I keep myself busy 24/7. I am busy doing something... I am very busy, I do not think about it... we have moved on. But there are some days, mostly nights when I struggle. When I can't breathe. When I think about it I can't breathe.'***

Mothers may experience guilt, anger, or feelings of inadequacy, especially when they feel they should have taken action sooner or that they have failed in some way. One mother reflected on staying in an abusive relationship, blaming herself for not leaving earlier:

> ***'I wanted my son to have a family unit so much, I couldn't believe the change had happened. I think it was my naivety that let that happen. Because at the first instance of domestic abuse I should have got up and walked out. That's where I put the blame on myself.'***

The culture of "just getting on with it" can be both empowering and harmful. It empowers mothers to navigate difficult situations but can also leave them feeling unsupported and isolated. One mother shared that she didn't feel the domestic abuse situation she was experiencing was severe enough for Women's Aid, which reflects a broader societal issue where mothers often feel their struggles aren't "bad enough" to warrant help:

> ***'I didn't feel that it was severe enough for (place) Women's Aid. Like there's women out there in much worse circumstances that would have benefited more from those resources.'***

While families often cope with the present, they express concern about the long-term impact of these experiences on the children. This uncertainty about future emotional or behavioural impacts adds an additional layer of anxiety for parents:

> ***'At the moment they are doing fine, I do worry about what impact this will have in the future on them. But at the same time, you can't just sit at home and cry every day, you've got to carry on.'***

Summary

- Mothers and other carers show resilience despite facing significant challenges.
- While the mothers often handle everything on their own, this can lead to feelings of isolation, and emotional strain.
- The pressure to "just get on with it" can be empowering but also prevents personal emotional healing.
- Mothers and carers show concern about the long-term impact on their children add additional anxiety.

Recommendations

- Acknowledge the emotional considerations in the situation and ensure mothers don't feel they must cope alone.
- Provide emotional support through counselling and peer group support.
- Enhance systemic support so services are more accessible and reduce feelings of isolation.

Supporting the children

The experiences shared by the mothers and other carers demonstrate challenges in managing how to communicate with children about the incarcerated parent. There's a clear tension between protecting children from distress and being honest with them about the realities of the situation. For younger children, such as pre-schoolers, families often avoid discussing the incarcerated parent's situation in detail. For instance, one family continued to tell their younger child that the father was "at work," not wanting to expose them to the reality of the situation yet.

Older children and teens, however, tend to have more questions and are more aware of the situation. These families often take a more reactive approach to communication, answering questions as they arise and allowing the teen to lead the conversation:

> ***'And then I had a sit down about it (contact with father) and thought, hold on a minute I need to actually speak to (son) and see if this is what he wants. He's at an age now where he can make his own choice. And he said he wanted to speak to him.'***

In some cases, the difficulty lies in having children of different ages, where it becomes challenging to tailor information appropriately:

> ***'But now there is another battle, another journey as a parent, we had two parties in my home (daughter) and (son) on one side; (other daughter) is in the middle, and (daughter) and (son) and (daughter), three parties, who are not aware of anything.'***

For one family with a child with autism, explaining the situation was particularly challenging. They expressed the difficulty of managing the child's curiosity about the father's absence without causing feelings of rejection or distress:

> ***'It's quite hard to manage because he has become, on occasions, curious about his father, and it's how I answer that, kind of pick up those pieces, and explain it to a child with autism. Without him feeling rejected. It's quite difficult to manage that.'***

There was the constant worry that the truth would inevitably come out. There was a desire to protect their child's innocence for as long as possible, but also recognising the inevitability of having to deal with the truth at some point:

> ***'I've been dreading the day when one of the girls tell (child). Or she's party to a conversation where she learns that her daddy is in prison because we've always just told her that her dad's just working away and she does get to speak to him occasionally when she's at nanny's. She'll get a phone call from him and she has a long chat with him and she's happy with that.'***

In some cases, mothers and other carers were struggling to navigate these difficult conversations alone. They expressed the need for more professional guidance on how to approach these sensitive subjects with children, especially as they grow older and start asking more direct questions about their incarcerated parent:

> ***'I said I don't want to put her in the position that she understands that daddy's in prison and I don't want to go to any groups that will bring that to light. Maybe I will when it's brought to light, maybe at that point I will need to say come on how do we deal with this and I'll turn to them...'***

The mothers and carers highlighted that family dynamics shift dramatically when one parent is incarcerated. Children can experience feelings of loss, and the separation often causes emotional and behavioural challenges. The emotional toll is evident in the behavioural changes observed in some children. For example, one mother described how her child's emotional regulation deteriorated, leading to isolation, school exclusions, and overall emotional distress:

> ***'It was fine at first and then it just really went downhill, his emotional regulation just went. It just wasn't there. I managed to get an EHCP [Education and Health Care Plan]. He then got isolated through that school... He's been excluded for 16.5 days, so he's basically on the verge of permanent exclusion.'***

Mothers and other carers also highlighted the need for support services to help children process these experiences. External services such as those provided by charities were often essential to filling the gaps left by formal systems:

> ***'I just think he needs something for his communication and connections. Connections with people. I feel like he stays very closed off.'***

Summary

- Mothers and carers face challenges in communicating with their children about an incarcerated parent, balancing the need to protect children from distress while being honest about the situation.
- Younger children are often shielded from the truth, while mothers and other carers take a responsive approach to older children and teens' questions.
- The difficulty increases when managing children of different ages or with special needs.
- Mothers and other carers wanted professional guidance in how to best communicate the situation with their children.
- The incarceration also leads to shifts in family dynamics, causing emotional and behavioural challenges for children.
- There is a need for better support services to help children process these experiences.

Recommendations

- Provide professional guidance to help families navigate difficult conversations with children.
- Tailor communication approaches to the child's age, needs, and developmental stage.
- Offer support services for children to help with emotional and behavioural challenges, especially through schools and external services.

Support from family

The mothers and carers had mixed experiences with family support. In some families, extended family provided crucial support. For example, in one case, the mother had been coercively isolated, but once the father left, her extended family "swooped in" to provide both emotional and practical support:

> ***'And my family were my biggest advocates at this point, they were the ones that gave me the strength, because I thought they didn't care, they weren't interested, because I'd isolated myself so much, but when he left, my God they swooped in!'***

Families who have extended family support had less agency involvement. In two cases maternal grandmothers were the main carer. For others, extended family was not a source of support, and some even add extra challenge – for example not acknowledging the impact of the father's actions on the family, or deliberately sabotaging the mother's attempts to get back on her feet after the father's imprisonment. Family members can become part of the problem rather than the solution. The deliberate absence of support, or manipulation, can add significant emotional distress, especially when trying to navigate an already challenging situation:

> ***'I always remember that just after he'd gone to prison his parents came to my house and his mother was like oh, I can't believe you're not going to give your marriage another chance, I can't believe he's gone to prison, she was very like poor him poor him.'***

Summary

- Mothers and other carers had mixed experiences with extended family support.
- In some cases, extended family provided crucial emotional and practical help, reducing the need for agency involvement.
- For others, family members were unsupportive or even harmful, either ignoring the impact of the incarcerated parent's actions or sabotaging the mother's efforts to rebuild family life.
- This lack of support or manipulation can add significant emotional distress to an already challenging situation.

Recommendations

- Encourage positive family involvement by promoting the role of supportive extended family in helping mothers and other carers.
- Provide alternative support networks for families lacking extended family support, such as peer support groups.

School: a consistent, and largely positive, presence

The relationship between the school, family, and child can be a significant factor in providing stability and emotional support for children during a difficult time. For most, the school was seen as a positive, supportive resource. Mothers and other carers reported working closely with the school around contact:

> ***'I worked very closely with the schools...they knew my struggle...'***

For the children, achievements at school builds self-esteem, and positive future goals. One child's aspirations to pursue law, criminology, and forensic science highlight how school support can also encourage a child's ambitions, despite the challenges they are facing.

Schools were often aware of the situation which helped ensure that the child was not only supported academically but emotionally too. Schools were also key in referring families to further support. For example, Early Help or Children Heard and Seen:

> ***'At some point I was so lost I asked for help from school because I didn't know what else to do and then school put me in touch with Early Help. They helped me a lot, they helped me set some boundaries, that I would drop my son at some public place and he would pick him up and not come into my house anymore.'***

The experience with secondary schools was particularly positive. Secondary schools appeared better equipped to help children deal with difficult situations, such as an incarcerated parent. Conversely, primary schools seemed less equipped, or confident, to support in such situations:

> ***'Secondary school were like really good, they were really clued up, if she needed someone to talk to, she could just go to Miss, like secondary school was so good. But primary school, obviously they're not set up for it.'***

Some frustrations with school were noted. One parent described feeling frustrated that although the school was aware of their child's situation, they didn't offer anything in terms of concrete support. The school's suggestion that the child could come and talk to them felt somewhat disingenuous, particularly for teenagers who may be reluctant to approach teachers on their own. Sometimes there was a lack of joined up thinking by school when behavioural issues, likely an outworking of home challenges, resulted in school exclusion – exacerbating an already difficult situation:

'I said to them he does this on purpose, he wants to come home. He wants to come home, because like in his head as well he doesn't know if I'm safe, and that's what I said to them. He wants to come home. He's doing these things because he knows that that's going to be the end result, he's going to be at home where he wants to be. I feel like they've just swept it under the carpet because he just shuts down so much that he refuses and just walks away.'

Summary

- Schools play a key role in supporting children of incarcerated parents, providing emotional and academic support.
- Many families reported positive experiences, but frustrations arose when schools didn't offer enough concrete help for the child.
- There can be a lack of joined up thinking i.e. when behavioural issues led to exclusions.

Recommendations

- Training for school staff to better support children of incarcerated parents.
- Offer concrete support for children who experience parental incarceration such as counselling or dedicated pastoral support.
- Address behavioural issues holistically to avoid exclusions.
- Schools should develop an awareness of parental imprisonment and its impact on children. School policies and supports for affected children along with training of key pastoral and safeguarding staff could build an inclusive culture for children, reducing isolation and stigma.

Work: challenges and benefits

Only a few mothers and other carers spoke about work. When employers were flexible and understanding this helped ease some of the stress of managing the complexities of having an incarcerated parent and raising children:

'I work for a housing association...they're aware of everything and they're really good, like with absolutely everything.'

For another mother/carer, work became difficult because their child was struggling with school attendance. When the child stopped attending school, she had to stop working to focus on the child's needs. This added financial stress to an already difficult situation. One mother described how she would be able to start working once their child is in school full-time. This illustrates the direct link between a child's stability and a parent's ability to work:

'Not at the moment, but I will be signing the papers for school next week and he will be full time. Then I will be able to think about starting work. I started work a few years ago but it was really difficult for him to attend school at the time and then he stopped going completely so I had to stop working.'

Summary

- A few mothers and other carers mentioned work, noting that flexible and understanding employers helped reduce stress within a difficult situation.
- However, when children faced difficulties, such as poor school attendance, some had to stop working to focus on their child's needs, adding financial strain.

Recommendations:

- Encourage flexible work arrangements to support those balancing work and caregiving.
- Offer financial assistance to families facing financial strain due to caregiving challenges as a result of parental incarceration.

The scarcity of therapeutic support for mothers, other carers, and children

While one mother received counselling and one teenager had mentorship, the lack of ongoing therapeutic support for mothers, other carers, and children across the accounts highlights a significant gap in the support system for families impacted by parental incarceration. Early Help services were appreciated. For example, in one case connecting the mother to Domestic Violence Victim services, which ultimately led to counselling. Interestingly, one mother refused to accept counselling due to concerns about giving her ex-partner the satisfaction of knowing he'd affected her mentally, which demonstrates a complicated relationship with trauma recovery:

> ***'I tried to go to talking therapies, they brought up the possible idea of PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder]. At that point I thought I don't want him to have the satisfaction of giving me that label, the knowledge that he's messed with my mind. So, I kind of just hid away from that.'***

There is generational trauma in the mothers' and other carers' accounts. They are trying to navigate their own emotional struggles while also caring for children who are dealing with their own trauma. This shared trauma can make it difficult for both mothers and other carers, and children, to process and deal with the challenges they face. It was generally felt by mothers and other carers of teenage children that they could not provide all the emotional support for their children, and that they needed specific support. There was an expressed desire for mentors or support workers for their children who are genuinely qualified and equipped to provide this support:

> ***'I think just having somebody for my son. I think there should be mentors, perhaps, but ones that are genuinely equipped and qualified to come in and have chats with certain children or to certain families to support them where needed.'***

One of the barriers to accessing support appears to be the tendency for children to decline offered services. In the case of one teenager, various forms of support were offered by the school (e.g., mentorship, forest school, bespoke timetables, trusted adult schemes), but he declined them all. This is not uncommon for teens, who may resist outside help. The mother felt the issue lay in the way the services are offered – merely presenting the option for support without active engagement or encouragement from trusted adults:

> ***'We go into the meetings and they're like we can offer this support, and he'll just refuse. Instead of actually just giving the support! Then they say he's declined it – and I say but you haven't actually given him the support, you've just given him the option of the support and he's going to decline because he's going to shut down on you. He doesn't want to do anything. You kind of need to be the adult and tell him you are doing this.'***

Summary

- While a few mothers and children received some support, such as counselling and mentorship, there is a significant gap in ongoing therapeutic support for families impacted by parental incarceration.
- There is generational trauma, with mothers navigating their emotional struggles while supporting children with their own trauma.
- Several mothers, especially of teens, expressed a need for specialised emotional support for their children.

Recommendations:

- Increase access to therapy for both parents and children to address trauma.
- Provide tailored support for children that aligns with their developmental stage and specific needs.

The criminal justice system: a mixed picture

The experiences with the police among the families were mixed. For families who had legal orders in place, such as Restraining Orders (ROs), Non-Molestation Orders (NMOs), or Prohibited Steps Orders (PSOs), the police response was generally perceived as rapid and supportive. These orders likely gave the police a clear framework within which they could act, leading to a more efficient and effective response to concerns. When there was a legal mandate, the police are more empowered to intervene, providing families with a sense of safety and reassurance. One mother mentions that the ex-partner was deterred from further contact because of the knowledge that she would seek police and court intervention if necessary. This highlights the importance of legal protections in providing victims with both the confidence and the institutional backing to manage the risks posed by an abusive ex-partner:

> ***'We had a prohibitive steps order when...for the first year that he left, that would have been 2013/14. There's nothing in place now but he's not made an appearance – he's not tried. And I think he knows that I will go through the police, and I will go through the court for contact, and that's a deterrent for him.'***

In some cases, families felt that the police were unresponsive or failed to follow through after initial contact. One mother recounted that after she called the police during a crisis, there was no follow-up to let her know what had happened or what she should be aware of going forward:

> ***'I never spoke to the police again after they came that morning, nobody ever came back to me to say this is what's happened and these are the things that you should probably be aware of...'***

This lack of communication can leave victims feeling unsupported and unsure of what actions were taken or needed. When families don't feel informed about the outcomes of police actions or the next steps in a case, they may lose confidence in the police's ability to protect or support them. This can lead to a lack of engagement with the police in the future.

For one mother, it was only after enduring years of abuse that she called the police for the first time:

> ***'That was the first time I had the courage to call the police after 18 years of beating...'***

This suggests that, in some cases, families may be reluctant to seek help, either because of fear of retaliation from their ex/partner, or because they have experienced disappointing or insufficient responses from helping agencies in the past.

The criminal justice system tended to be a drawn-out process for the families:

> ***'They would have been 6 and 9 when he was arrested and then 7 and 10 when he went to prison.'***

Sometimes this left the mother managing the offending parent's presence, and in some cases, the associated risk, in or around the family whilst awaiting trial. This led to confusion for the children, experiencing a changed family dynamic.

The lack of information regarding prison release dates can leave families in a state of uncertainty and anxiety. For families in this situation, knowing when the offending parent is expected to be released can help them prepare for potential challenges. This preparation might include safety plans, emotional support, or practical arrangements for the children. This is especially pertinent when there is a history of violence or threats from the offending parent:

> ***'I can't even find out his release date. Which I think is absolutely ridiculous. I don't have any time to prepare, I don't have any time to put things in place, to put myself in a position of safety.'***

Some mothers raised the unjust situation where the offending partner received legal aid in family court proceedings, yet the mother was not eligible to receive legal aid payments and therefore had to pay out of their own funds for any legal advice or support in keeping their child safe.

Summary

- Families with legal orders generally had positive experiences with police.
- However, some felt unresponsive police actions and lack of follow-up left them unsupported.
- Fear, distrust, and past negative experiences could lead to reluctance to involve the police.
- The criminal justice process was slow, sometimes leaving mothers and other carers to manage the offending parent's presence.
- A lack of information on release dates caused anxiety for mothers and other carers.
- Often legal aid was available to the incarcerated parent, but not to the remaining parent or carer, making it difficult to have equal voice at family court.

Recommendations

- Ensure police follow-up and clear communication of next steps.
- Provide information about criminal justice processes and release dates.
- Assist remaining parents, especially where they are also victims, with gaining support interacting with the legal system.

Social services: a complex and strained relationship

The mothers and other carers described mixed experiences with social services. A common thread among the more negative experiences is that social workers seemed more focused on removing immediate risks (such as abuse or neglect) rather than providing longer-term support for the family's emotional, practical, or psychological needs. Once the immediate threat was addressed, in these cases through the incarceration of the offending parent, the social worker would often close the case without offering additional support:

> *'We had social services involved before he went to prison, he had a mental health break down so they were involved just checking everything was OK and he was seeking help, and when he went to prison the social worker said, oh we're going to close your case. The social worker was like, you've got this don't worry...!'*

Mothers and other carers expressed that what they needed was support and guidance on how to navigate the impact of parental incarceration, or provide emotional support for the children involved:

> *'But even still I always remember saying to them, what happens if he doesn't go to prison? Or he goes to prison and then he comes out and tries to contact them? They were like well you need to contact court and you need to sort all that out yourself. It's no wonder things happen because you're just leaving people to do what they want. You've got these specialists but they're not really specialists.'*

Several mothers felt penalised by social services rather than offered assistance, leaving them feeling unsupported and judged:

> *'She came to my house, late, she handed me a paper – I still have that paper somewhere, and she said that I did it wrong. I shouldn't have let my son go with him. I wasn't a good mother because I put him at risk. And then she turned against me, you know. I was the bad mother... Well, I was petrified. Because it would be her word against mine. And even though I was trying to do everything they were asking me to do, to avoid social services being involved. I was very scared that I would lose my son.'*

There were positive experiences where social workers took immediate and proactive steps to support the family. In one case, a social worker quickly stepped in to help the mother get legal support when she was overwhelmed by the stress of dealing with a coercive relationship. This response was appreciated for its timeliness and practical assistance:

> *'She literally put me in a car and took me to a solicitor there and then, she could see the stress I was in, she could see the messages, and the calls that were relentless while I was trying to have a meeting with her about caring for my son who was going through the autism diagnosis process. She literally put me in a car and took me straight away.'*

Another positive experience involved Early Help services, which provided more consistent support and assistance, such as helping a family find a safe place to live and offering ongoing emotional support:

> *'She was amazing really, she was the one that helped us get this place, this nice place, she has been the main support in our lives for almost a year. She just finished with us last week because now my son is going to school, and we are safe, so she had to step away.'*

Summary

- Families had mixed experiences with social services.
- While social workers responded promptly to immediate risks, they did not provide longer-term support for emotional, practical, or psychological needs once the immediate danger was addressed.
- Some mothers felt judged rather than assisted.

Recommendations

- Provide longer-term support beyond immediate crisis intervention, including emotional and psychological assistance for family members.

Third Sector support

As many of the mothers had experienced domestic violence, refuge support featured in their accounts. One family shared their experience of being taken into a refuge while the offending parent was still free and reflected on the irony of this. Support with the court process, particularly when the children were involved, was valued. One family was supported by SAFE, an independent charity providing support to children and families around the Thames Valley who have been affected by crime or abuse. This agency supported the children throughout the court process. This mother expressed incredulity about the reliance on charities to provide such essential services, questioning why these services are not government-funded:

> ***'It shocks me what we rely on charities to do, because to me this should be a government funded service, rather than relying on charity referrals and good will almost!'***

The number of families that took up the Operation Paramount offer as a result of contact for this evaluation was remarkable. This was often around legal support, specifically around issues of contact and parental responsibility. This raises consideration around best timing for the Operation Paramount offer. In the immediacy of arrest and imprisonment it may not be the best time as the mother or other carer is in crisis management mode. It may be that re-offering the pathway further down the line may be beneficial. There were counter-narratives here too; for example, one family declined the offer, as they didn't want parental imprisonment to become normalised in the child's mind, however there was overwhelmingly positive uptake at this point in time.

Very few mothers or carers from the group who had received Operation Paramount originally mentioned the contact. Those that wanted to take up the support at that time spoke more of the support agency than the police contact. This demonstrated intervention as intended: a brief and focused contact, by an almost 'invisible helper'. This contact effectively communicating the pathway into support, and families agentic in uptake.

Summary

- Refuge support was crucial for mothers experiencing domestic violence, with charities like SAFE offering valuable court process assistance.
- Many mothers and other carers took up the Operation Paramount pathway for legal support i.e. regarding parental responsibility.
- The timing of this offer is important; mothers or carers managing crisis may benefit from re-offers later.
- Some families declined services to avoid normalising parental imprisonment for their children.
- The Operation Paramount contact is brief and focused; enabling family agency in uptake of support.

Recommendations

- Re-offer support such as Operation Paramount when families are ready.

What does this mean?

This analysis has not been conducted with any intention to suggest future outcomes for children. It is intended purely to shine a light on some of the challenges children face prior to and after the imprisonment of a parent, with the aim of assisting ongoing efforts to support all children with a parent in prison.

The gender of the parent who is imprisoned makes a significant difference in what happens to their children. In terms of who becomes the carer; when male parents are incarcerated, the child's mother is very likely to become the carer, while when a female parent is incarcerated this is not the case for the father. When a female parent is sent to prison, the child is much more likely to become a child we care for (CWCF) or to be subject to a special guardianship order. However, whilst the risk of becoming a CWCF or subject to an SGO is higher in female incarceration, the overall number of children affected by these outcomes is higher when males are imprisoned, simply due to the far higher rate of male parents being incarcerated.

As identified through the interviews, there was a high level of domestic abuse within the cohort of Operation Paramount cases. This may also be reflected in the reasons why there was a high rate of no contact with the incarcerated parent, and with that being seen as a positive. However, it is important to note that police services are more likely to identify children in domestic incidents, or offences that are directly committed against children, than in incidents that do not directly affect the family unit, or the children. This may also lead to women being less likely to be identified in data as having links to children when incarcerated, though it may also be more likely that they would inform the police, court or prison about their own links to a child.

It is likely that improvements could be made to identification of families through police data; first, by training officers to record links to children in all cases where a person is arrested, and also by working to ensure that all links that are present in data are made and used, as police data often holds information about children that are not linked to other people automatically.

There will be other cases of parental incarceration that cannot be found through police data alone, and other data sources should be examined to assess what additional benefit they would add in relation to the identification of children whose parent or parents have gone to prison. It would be beneficial to examine the use of combined multi-agency datasets for identification of children whose parents have been incarcerated. Appropriate sharing of data between agencies, with proper understanding of how the data sources complement each other would ensure that the best possible information is available, helping no children who are subject to parental imprisonment to go unrecognised.

Mental and emotional strain placed on the remaining parent or carer, when a parent has been incarcerated may make it more difficult to accept support, especially if it would involve them reaching out or taking action themselves. Services may be able to assist significantly by being more proactive in how and when they offer support.

Repeated offers of support would not add much additional work or effort, as the data matching and identification part has to be done for the first offer of support. However, it may well make an enormous difference to the parent or carer in need of support. It should be noted that when telephone calls were placed in this trial, the use of a skilled officer who empathised with the women she spoke with led to high rates of request for onward referral, and the majority of the families who were contacted on the phone were open to talking. This may indicate that phone calls may well be effective in some cases, whilst acknowledging that 50 families did not answer the phone. It is not known whether this may be in some part due to the calls being from a withheld or unknown number (police outgoing calls).

It is clear from the data and the interviews that most parents and carers felt significant strain, and had to overcome many difficulties during the period of the incarceration. Even though there were many cases where the imprisonment was felt to be a good thing due to reductions in domestic violence, there were still additional pressures placed on the remaining parent. This may well lead to a reduction in available capacity to accept support, especially just after the imprisonment when an entire family's lives will have changed.

Some families did accept support right away at the time of the first offer, and Operation Paramount led to more support being provided to people who needed it than would have been the case without Operation Paramount. However, many more families accepted support when it was re-offered on the phone. Therefore it would be worthwhile to also look at additional offers of support at later dates.

The interviews showed the level of difficulty faced, and showed why some families may not be able to comprehend taking the support even if needed. Repeated offers at different timeframes may lead to more people being supported and getting the help they need, as most stated they needed either support for their child, for themselves, or with legal issues relating to the incarceration. More research would be beneficial in relation to the method of the contact, and the timing, or repeating, of contact that is made to offer support.

Most families who were interviewed by telephone did not have contact with the incarcerated parent, and this was generally seen to be a positive thing. Many mothers did feel isolated however, and found it difficult to explain to their children what had happened. It is likely that many families would benefit from support with communication about what has happened, as well as with therapeutic support for both the children and the non-incarcerated parent, to help with processing what can be significant levels of trauma. In many cases, relationships with extended family such as grandparents were helpful, though this did also result in some degree of coercion and control within some family dynamics. It is important that support is flexible, centred around the family's needs, and tailored to the developmental stage and specific needs of the children.

Relationships with criminal justice agencies and with social services varied dependent on circumstances, with agencies being viewed much more positively in cases where they had provided a definite offer of support, such as additional provision for a child, or an order that prevented further harm. When family law proceedings were necessary, it was apparent that in many cases the incarcerated parent would be provided legal aid, whilst the remaining parent was ineligible and had to pay for any legal support they used. This may in turn make it less likely that they are appropriately represented and safeguarded, or that money may have to be used towards this, despite financial circumstances often being constrained for families who have had a parent imprisoned.

Schools play a key role in supporting children of incarcerated parents, providing emotional and academic support for the children. Many families reported positive experiences, but frustrations arose when schools didn't offer enough concrete help for the child, and especially where a lack of joined up thinking led to the child being excluded from school. There is also likely a dependency on the family telling the school what has occurred, as information is regularly not shared openly between public sector agencies.

We are aware that some schools have embedded a supportive environment for children who have parents in prison; through providing time and creative space for those children to talk about and share experiences with their peers. Model schools policies and additional support offers should be put in place, and a number of charities around the UK have examples of these policies and practices. Information is available on these on request from the authors.

There was no discernible difference in the interviews between cases that had been eligible for Operation Paramount, and those that had not been. This may well be due to the very individual impact of the incarceration of a parent, the different circumstances surrounding the imprisonment, and also the amount that is going on for the remaining parent or carer at the time the offer of support was made. The Operation Paramount visit was not mentioned, even in cases where it had led to additional longer term support. In cases where support was received from Children Heard and Seen, this was mentioned and their support was greatly valued, and is likely an ongoing relationship. The third sector currently provides a large proportion of the support that is available to the children and families.

It is clear that many families that have experienced parental incarceration would benefit from significant levels of support. Operation Paramount has provided a mechanism by which children and families can be recognised, and support can be provided to them. It may not matter that the officers who made the offer were not remembered, as it may have formed a silent route that led to support reaching children and families that needed it, though the level of support that is available could benefit from being increased in many areas.

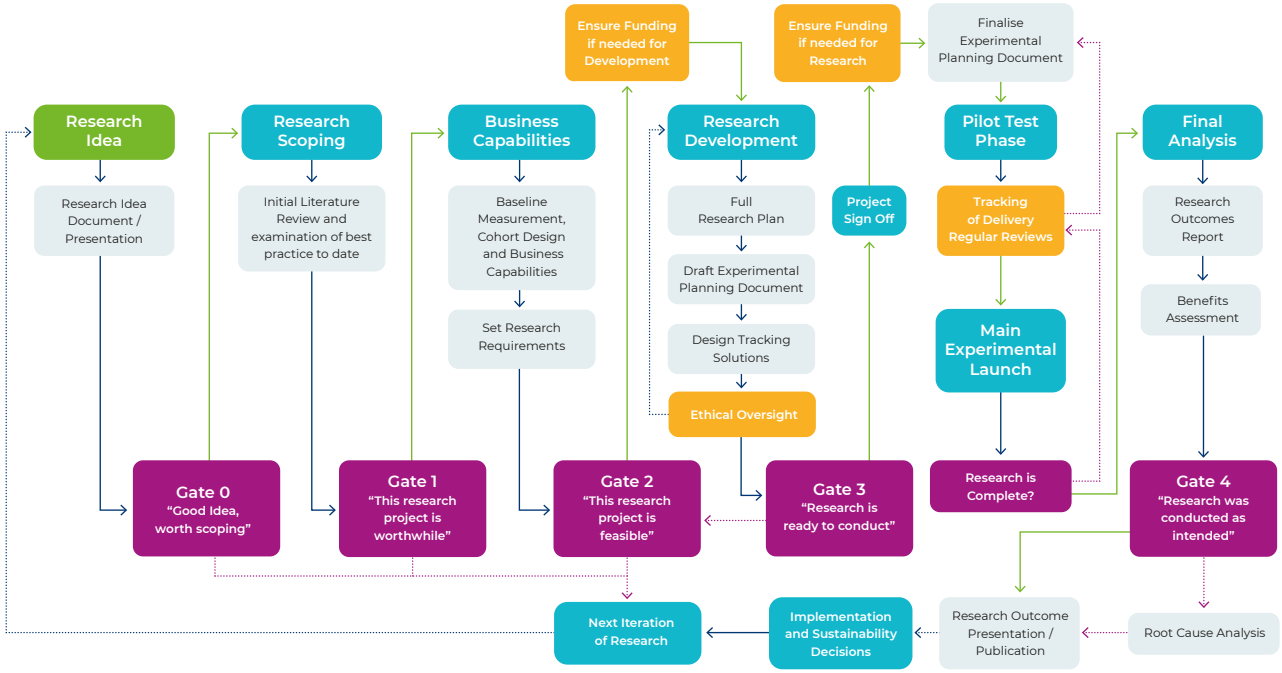
Appendix A: Our Approach: The Research Project Lifecycle

In order to avoid some of the pitfalls often associated with public sector research projects, which often lead to not being able to say what works, or what effect has been had for the money or resource invested, we developed the Research Project Lifecycle.

This is a project management approach to running research projects in the public sector, and allows for the research management team to pause at each stage to ensure that it still meets the needs of the organisation, that it is based in best evidence, that it is possible and feasible to run, and that it is well planned, ensuring the best and most ethical test of something that can actually be implemented.

This approach has enabled Thames Valley Violence Prevention Partnership to conduct multiple concurrent high quality interventions, including six randomised controlled trials in a range of different areas.

Embedding a "what works" approach



Reference: Adapted from Olphin, T.P.A., (2023). *Research Project Lifecycle: A Structured Approach to Conducting Research in the Public Sector, Reading, UK*: Thames Valley Violence Reduction Unit.

Appendix B: Data Analysis Tables

Chi-Squared Tests

What is being tested	Incarcerated Parent is Male	Incarcerated Parent is Female	Percentage change from control	Chi-squared test results	Likelihood of finding by chance
Is the remaining carer the mother or father?	Yes = 536 No = 71	Yes = 8 No = 24	114% higher when female parent incarcerated	$\chi 2 = 96.2426$ df = 1, p-value < 0.001	Under 0.1%
Does the child become a looked after child (LAC)?	Yes = 20 No = 587	Yes = 5 No = 27	374% higher when female parent incarcerated	$\chi 2 = 12.2932$ df = 1, p-value < 0.001	Under 0.1%
Does the child become subject to a special guardianship order (SGO)?	Yes = 7 No = 600	Yes = 6 No = 26	1426% higher when female parent incarcerated	$\chi 2 = 47.2268$ df = 1, p-value < 0.001	Under 0.1%

Authors and Referencing

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To reference, please use:

Bekaert, S., Olphin, T., Massie, R. & Norris, J. (2025) *What Works Series: Operation Paramount – Statistical analysis of children in Oxfordshire affected by parental imprisonment*, Thames Valley Violence Prevention Partnership: Kidlington, UK.

Funding and Acknowledgements

This research was conducted by Thames Valley Violence Prevention Partnership and would not have been possible without funding from UK Home Office, as part of the Violence Reduction Unit programme.

This work would also not have been possible if not for the support provided by Thames Valley Police in accessing and matching data.

We are grateful for the support of Children Heard and Seen throughout the Operation Paramount process. They have provided a lifeline of support to children who are in a time of significant need. Thank you for all you do.

WHAT WORKS

Contact Us

If you have any questions please contact the core programme team via **vpp@thamesvalley.police.uk**

Our website has information on all our projects and evaluations. **www.tvvpp.co.uk**

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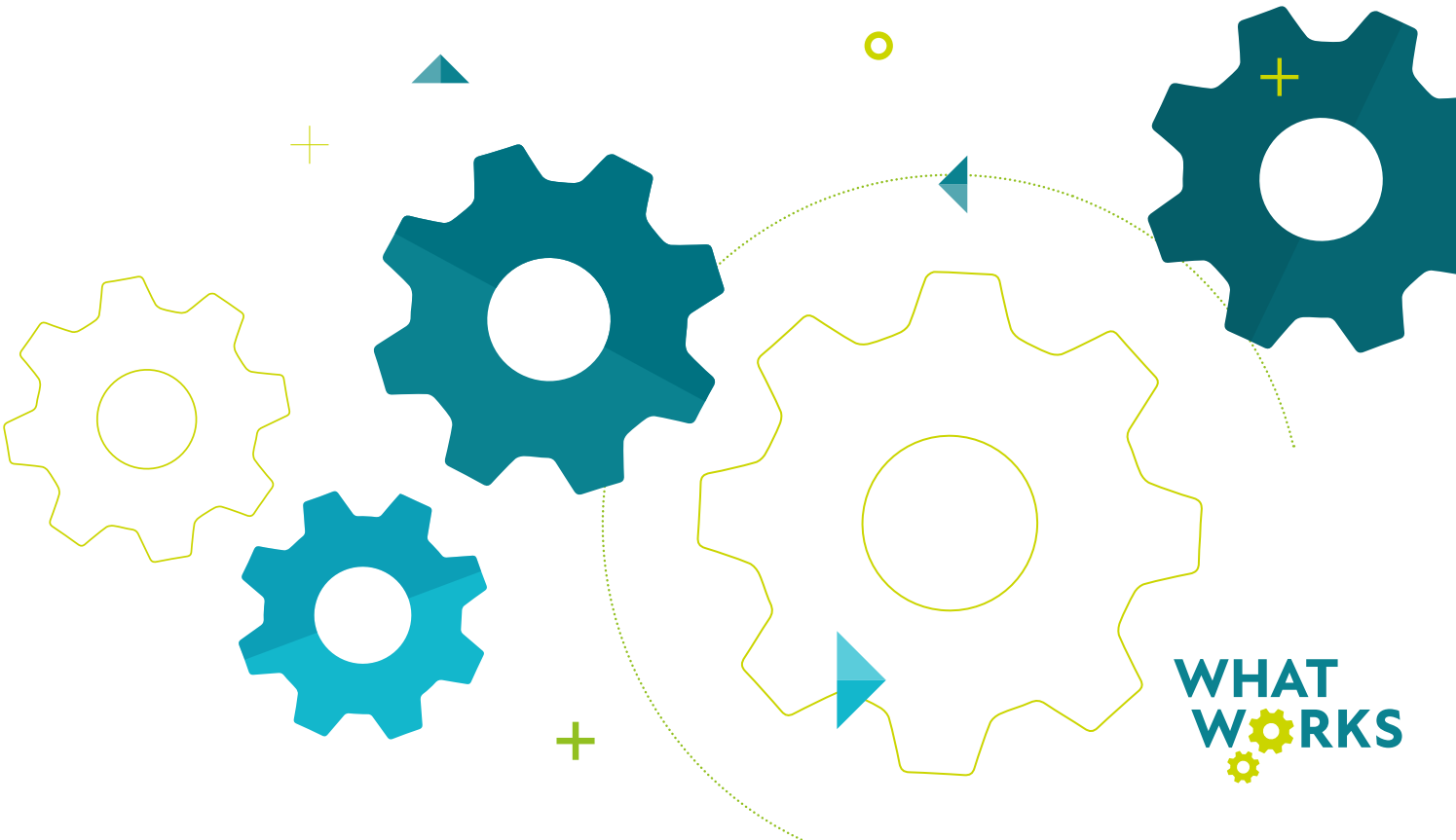

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VIOLENCE
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WHAT
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