



Parenting and relationship support programmes for offenders and their families

Executive summary

Key findings

- Offenders disproportionately have a background of family breakdown, poor nurturing and abuse during childhood.
- A majority of offenders are parents, 54%, have children under 18 when they enter custody while two thirds of women prisoners are mothers.
- More children are impacted by a parent's imprisonment than are affected by divorce. The 200,000 children with a parent in prison is three times the number in care and five times more than are on the Child Protection Register.
- Almost half of offenders are reconvicted within twelve months, creating a cycle of disadvantage and reduced life chances for offenders and their families.
- Children of offenders are three times more likely to experience mental health problems, exhibit anti-social behaviour and more likely also to become NEET.
- The cycle of re-offending also transmits offending behaviour across generation. Almost two thirds of boys who have had a father in prison go on to offend themselves.
- NOMS "Children and Families" pathway to reducing offending builds on the evidence that maintaining family relationship is a protective factor in offending. Offenders who maintain family relationships and receive visits while in custody are 38% less likely to reoffend than those who do not receive visits.
- In a significant departure from historic practice, the offender is viewed within the context of the family and there is recognition that families also serve a "hidden sentence".
- At national and strategic level there is a new emphasis within the criminal justice system on partnership working with local authorities' to link services for offenders to those in the wider community. These initiatives are at an early stage.
- Family support services for offenders can be broadly grouped into four categories delivered by a wide variety of service providers both in custody and the community and focused on:
 - Maintaining relationships with family members
 - Parental learning and parental / relationships skill building
 - Transformational family-based interventions
 - Casework-based family support
- There are outstanding examples of best practice provision in family services both within the custodial estate and the delivery of community sentences.
- There appears however to be something of a gap between the national policy vision and execution at the front line in commissioning family services.
- Family services are often not seen as a priority or are limited in scale and ambition. Individual governors may lack the skills or motivation to link up with wider community services. This is far less true of the women's estate however.
- There appears to be little structured assessment of family need within sentence planning and significant variation in the quality and scale of family service provision commissioned.

There is little awareness among commissioners of the range of services available.

- There is also little structured targeting of family services to specific cohorts of prisoners or to family need, nor a systematic approach to focusing services where they are most likely to impact on re-offending. This in part reflects a lack of data within the CJS on family needs, with it being difficult even to identify parents.
- The interviews undertaken with offenders and their families to inform the project suggest that where family services have been available, they are greatly valued.
- The review activity revealed a number of instances where family services had been life-changing and had supported desistance, working also against the inter-generational transmission of offending behaviour.
- The wider evidence supports a link between dysfunctional family relationships and of supportive and pro-social family relationships having a protective effect in desistance. The quality of the evidence is mixed however.
- In order to inform the intelligent commissioning of services going forward the project documents the range of services available and describes the key principles of best practice, both for the commissioning of family services and service provision.

Best practice in commissioning of family services

- Holistic – offenders and families
- Multi-dimensional – practical and emotional, short and long term
- Outward facing – links between prison / probation and wider community
- Embedded in and integral to offender management
- Engaging – to maximise motivation and appeal
- Inclusive – but also prioritised and focused
- Credible – to prison staff and external stakeholders
- Evidence-driven

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Wider policy context

The wider policy context is the Government strategy on social justice and social mobility and a broad policy focus on families and enhancing parenting skills. Criminal justice strategy reflects these wider policy approach with the vision for rehabilitation taking a holistic approach with the offender and the effort on reducing re-offending seen in the context of the wider family and the transmission of disadvantage and criminal behaviour across generations.

About this study

- The study was led by Policis in collaboration with Kingston University and Toynbee Hall. The underlying method rested on desk-mapping of available family services, 20 depth interviews with strategists and front line staff in selected service providers and ethnographic observation of clients and practitioners in 4 service providers. 32 depth interviews were undertaken with offenders and their families, being either service users or graduates of family service programmes. A synthesis of the available evidence on the impact of family services on re-offending was also undertaken.

Offenders disproportionately have a background of family breakdown, poor nurturing and abuse during childhood

- Among those in custody 27% were in care as a child, with 41% reporting domestic violence in the home as a child and 29% emotional, sexual or physical abuse as a child.
- A majority of offender are parents, 54% have children under 18 when they enter custody and two thirds of women prisoners are mothers. 19% of male offenders aged 18–20 are fathers compared to 4% of the wider population 10% of boys and 9% of girls aged 15–18 in prison have children themselves.

Significant numbers of children are impacted by parents' imprisonment

- There are approximately 200,000 children in England and Wales with a parent in prison, with 17,000 children separated from their mother by imprisonment. Some 7% of children will experience their father's imprisonment during their time at school. Some 45% of prisoners lose contact with their family whilst in prison.
- Women prisoners are more likely than men to be held a hundred miles or more away from home. Only 9% of children whose mothers are in prison are cared for by their fathers while their mother is in custody and just 5% of children stay in their own homes while their mother is in custody.

The cycle of re-offending transmits disadvantage and offending behaviour across generations

- The cycle of re-offending perpetuates disadvantage, particularly for younger prisoners and those serving shorter sentences. Almost half (47%) of prisoners are re-convicted within 12 months, rising to 57% of those serving sentences of less than a year.
- Reoffending is also a function of age. Re-conviction within 12 months peaks at 70% for 18–20 year olds, declining thereafter with each age cohort, being 35% for over 40 year olds.
- A pattern of intergenerational transmission of disadvantage and reduced life-chances for the families of offenders also transmits criminogenic drivers and offending behaviour across generation.
- Children of offenders are three times more likely to experience mental health problems, exhibit anti-social behaviour and more likely also to become NEET.
- Critically, 65% of boys who have had a father in prison, go on to offend themselves. Over a third of prisoners have someone else in their family who has been convicted of a non-motoring offence.

NOMS "Children and Families" pathway to reducing offending builds on evidence that maintaining family relationship is a protective factor in offending

- NOMS seeks to reduce offending through an evidence-driven integrated offender management approach addressing the nine factors which have been demonstrated to be predictive factors in offending. These include poor family / marital relationships.
- This approach, rooted in the evidence on the protective factors for desistance, is encapsulated in the "seven pathways" to reducing re-offending, one of which is the "Children and Families" pathway. Offenders who maintain family relationships and receive visits while in custody are 38% less likely to reoffend than those who do not receive visits.
- There is a new emphasis on viewing the offender within the context of their family. This sits alongside a recognition of the "hidden sentence" endured by families of convicted and imprisoned offenders and has led to a "whole family" approach to maintaining strong family relationships and building relationship and parenting skills, representing a radical break with practice of the past.
- The "children and families pathway" sits in turn within a focused approach to segmentation of offenders, in which efforts on preventing re-offending are focused on those for whom the protective effect is likely to be greatest. Similarly interventions intended to promote desistance are timed for maximum impact within the offender journey.
- NOMS Commissioning intentions guidance emphasises the importance of family and relationship support services within prisons and community sentence services.
- Prisons and probation services are expected to facilitate services which meet family welfare needs, focus on the most effective interventions, and work with mainstream services to provide family services for both offenders and their families.

The mainstream family services landscape features a new emphasis on developing parental skills allied to a focus on the most Troubled Families

- The wider family services landscape and parental learning provision reflects the new social policy priorities and the emphasis on prevention and enhancing parenting skills.
- Examples of key developments in family services include parental learning delivered within the BIS Community Learning Trusts which deliver community education tailored to local need and which is focused on areas of disadvantage, The Department for Education's CANParent classes which aims to provide high quality parent support to parents of early years children in a two year pilot programme, delivered through a variety of initiatives and partnerships.
- There is also a wide range of provision for family learning ranging from formal classes to informal learning through secondary activities, provided by a wide range of mainly third sector organisations.
- These initiatives sit alongside focused and intensive intervention in the form of the "Troubled Families" programme focused on the estimated 120,000 families with the most complex needs across multiple dimensions. The programme, delivered at local level, with services determined by individual local authorities, aims to deliver a holistic programme of intervention designed to "turn around" Troubled Families' lives and reduce levels of crime, anti-social behaviour, truancy and worklessness.

Local authorities offer a range of children and family support services which are increasingly focused on the most urgent and serious cases

- Local authority family support services fall for the most part into three general categories; crisis support, family Intervention models and multi-systemic therapy. Against the background of austerity efforts are increasingly focused on the most urgent and serious cases:

- Crisis intervention aims to mitigate a specific crisis such as family breakdown, school exclusion, homelessness or a criminal conviction.
- Family Interventions adopts a case-work approach assessing the family needs as a whole and providing a framework for support, often through multi agency working, supported by the Common Assessment Framework.
- Multi-systemic therapy, an intensive family and community based treatment, aims to address the underlying psychological, experiential or circumstantial drivers of behaviour to effect change.
- The Troubled Families initiative has become an increasingly important focus of effort and resource and has itself facilitated a new emphasis on multi-agency partnership working around children and families with the most complex needs.

Within the criminal justice system a wide range of providers offer a mix of services from the relatively light touch to intensive casework-based working

- Family support services for offenders can be broadly grouped into four categories delivered by a wide variety of service providers both in custody and the community and focused on:
 - Maintaining relationships with family members
 - Parental learning and parental / relationships skill building
 - Transformational family-based interventions
 - Casework based family support
- There is also a range of niche services design to meet specific needs of a particular client group, pregnant women, those with numeracy or literacy or with drug or alcohol or addiction issues, for example.
- Family learning programmes are typically structured so as to meet commissioners' requirements to increase offenders' ability to contribute positively to society, with programmes structured where possible to lead to a qualification, thus also supporting the Skills and Employment pathway.
- In the face of the requirement for evidence-driven commissioning family services providers are increasingly focused on monitoring and measurement and delivering evidence of performance against outcomes.
- The family services sector faces significant headwinds in the form of increased costs and reduced revenues from charity, budget cuts and the increasing requirement by commissioners that services providers "do more with less".

There appears to be something of a gap between the national policy vision and commissioning practice at the front-line

- There are outstanding examples of family services efforts on rehabilitation, largely driven by individual governors or committed individuals.
- Within the custodial estate, families and family services not always seen as a priority. This was far less true of the women's estate and community sentences, particularly for women.
- Managers in the custodial estate often lacked the skills and contacts to build relationships with external agencies and were not always motivated to do so.
- There appears to a wide variation in the scale, focus and quality of family support services being commissioned.
- There appears also little awareness among commissioners of the range of services available.
- There is little strategic coherence in the way that services are commissioned, which is often piecemeal and limited in scale and ambition.
- There appears to be little structured targeting of specific offender cohorts or little in way of a systematic approach to matching services to specific family need.
- Targeting is highly challenging in an environment in which relevant data is often not collected and it is difficult even to identify offenders who are parents.

- There is little consideration of family needs in sentence planning with recruitment to programmes often driven by self-referrals, which tend to be from those who are in any case most family oriented.
- As a result, commissioned services are not necessarily reaching those with problematic relationships, those who would benefit most from support or those for whom the impact on the cycle of re-offending is likely to be greatest.

Offenders and their family members frequently had little concept of what good parenting means

- Relationship history was often of serial relationship breakdown with few positive parenting models or real sense of what good parenting means.
- Men in particular could see being a good father narrowly in terms of being a provider for the family, itself often contingent on criminal activity.

Separation from family is often deeply painful and a source of significant guilt and distress

- Separation from family in custody was often deeply painful, with many men cutting themselves off their feelings, which are difficult to express in the context of the landing culture.
- Men felt guilty and emasculated by not contributing to their family.
- Some suffered an acute fear of relationship-breakdown or that another man would take their place with children.
- Women were often deeply distressed, experiencing deep guilt and grief, particularly if they faced loss of their children. Mental health issues and self-harm was commonplace.

Partners and children were also suffered significant distress and faced a range of practical and financial problems

- The partners and children of offenders commonly experienced mental health issues, often alongside acute financial and practical problems.
- Children frequently experienced bullying at school and could disengage from education and exhibit a range of challenging and anti-social behaviours.
- The inherent difficulties in maintaining relationships over time and distance were often however compounded by poor relationship, communication and thinking skills among both offenders and their families.

Offenders and their families valued family services highly with many reporting a transformational effect on family life

- Family interventions that addressed family services needs appeared to have positive impacts:
- Initiatives focused on maintaining quality relationships with families, enhanced parents' sense of connection to family life, significantly reduce anxiety while also enhancing behaviour within the prison.
- Short parenting courses appeared to increased awareness and sensitivity to others, enhanced relationship and communication skills and made communications with family and children more positive.
- Offenders and their partners who had been involved in Intensive family interventions reported:
 - A transformational impact on family relationships, creating a positive context for resettlement.
 - That they were better able to manage emotions and think through the consequences of their actions.
 - Interventions had acted as an important catalyst for desistance from crime.
 - Their own change in direction had provided a more positive role models for children, mitigating propensity to offend.

The evidence on outcomes

- There is consistent support in the literature for:
 - A link between dysfunctional family relationships and offending and the inter-generational transmission of offending
 - Positive family relationships being a factor in desistance, pro-social behaviour and participation in employment
- The evidence is however of variable quality and are subject in many cases to a number of limitations:
 - A general absence of control or comparator groups for measuring net effects
 - Evidence is often based on self-reported outcomes
 - Much of the evidence is qualitative in nature
 - Sample sizes are typically small in number and may not be representative

Best practice commissioning models

- Family intervention should be introduced at the earliest possible stage of the offender journey in the custodial / community environment and as soon as possible in a criminal career.

The critical success factors

- It is critical to success that service commissioners within the CJS:
 - Define needs at each stage of the offender journey
 - Deploy a pro-active and needs-driven targeting strategy
 - Prioritise activities and sequences interventions for optimal effect on learning and behaviour
 - Consider which offender cohorts are most likely to be responsive to family intervention as a route to reducing re-offending

The core family and relationship needs to be addressed with family services provision:

- Maintaining ongoing relationships with family.
- Developing parental and relationship skills with a limited focus or discrete goals.

- Transformational family interventions designed to address entrenched patterns of criminogenic thinking and behaviour through a family and relationships lens.
- Family support – practical and emotional support to address a range of complex and multi-dimensional needs.

Matching provision to offender needs throughout the offender journey

- Offenders and their families have a series of family-related needs at each stage of the offender journey which should be built into sentence planning.

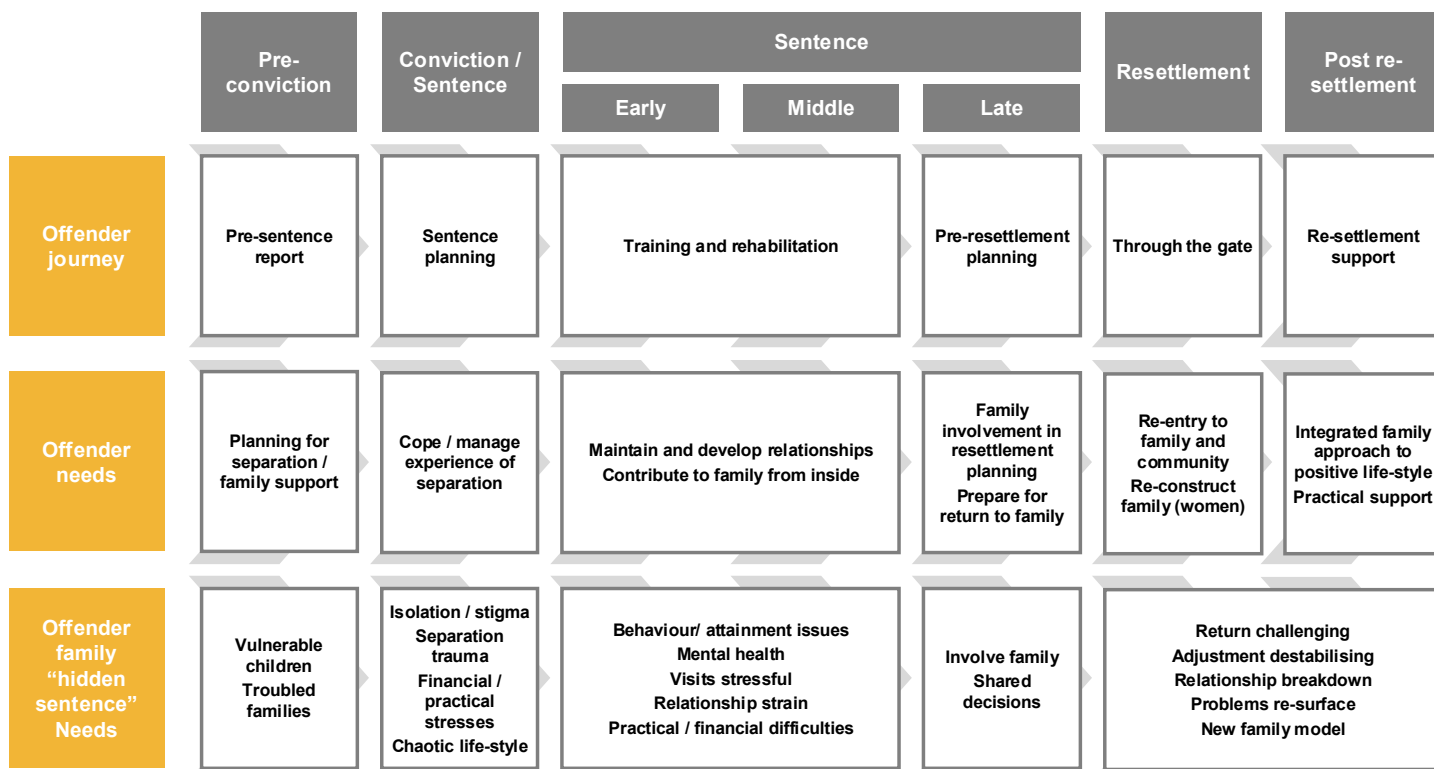
Family intervention necessitates and outward-looking stance

- Addressing the needs of the whole family and addressing the risk of inter-generational offending requires a partnership approach.
- This is best served by an integrated approach in which partnership working and co-commissioning of services is embedded.
- Commissioning should be evidence driven, with effective monitoring and evaluation built into the commissioning of all services.

The critical factors in changing behaviour and making the link to desistance

- Motivate / engage
- Space for self-reflection and self-awareness
- Fit to need
- Focus on those where benefits greatest
- Time to maximise impact for offender and family
- Sequence related interventions effectively
- Build understanding of impact of behaviour on / needs of other family members
- Opportunity to practice / use new awareness / skills with family members
- Follow through and link to resettlement and “through the gate” support

Matching provision to offender needs throughout the offender journey



Best practice models – service provision

- The service providers interviewed for the review had varying service and delivery models, differing aims and skills and were focused on a variety of target groups.
- The best practice service providers nonetheless shared a number of key characteristics in their interactions with clients. The extent to which an intervention is likely to feature all of these characteristics depends in part on the nature of the service being provided.

Best practice: key service characteristics

The services that made a difference appeared to be doing some / all of these things

- Trust / relationship based
- Needs-led:
 - Tailored
 - Flexible
- Empowering:
- Non-judgemental
- Emphasise ID as Parents / People first
- Positive stance / new possibilities
- Can influence events / destiny / have voice
- Challenging:
 - Attitudes
 - Impact of offending behaviour on family
 - To change behaviour
- Positive role models:
- Whole person / whole family

A Therapeutic Alliance between practitioners and service users

- For transformational interventions, the key characteristics came together in what might be described as a “Therapeutic Alliance” between practitioners and service users. The therapeutic alliance centres on an axis of Bond-Tasks-Goals:
 - **Bonds** assist in practitioner and service user establishing rapport and a functioning partnership based on equality, authority and respect.
 - **Tasks**: mutually agreed upon activities that the service users and practitioners develop together in order to reach desired outcomes, empowering the service user who can track progress on specific activities.
 - **Goals**: These are the desired outcomes of intervention for the service user. These need to be realistic and obtainable and are case-dependent. The bond between the two parties, allows discussion of the context and realism of these goals.

Observations and conclusions

- It will be important to build the profile of family interventions and actively promote the Children and Families pathway as a key tool in addressing re-offending and the intergenerational transmission of offending, while also raising awareness of the “hidden sentence” served by families.
- Family support and parental learning need to be re-framed as a strategic intervention and embedded in offender management from the earliest possible stage in the offender journey.
- Mainstream services need to be engaged around the impact of parental imprisonment on children in order to create a community of interest between the criminal justice system and wider family services. Effective partnership working and co-commissioning of services will be key.
- Commissioning of family services within the criminal justice system should be undertaken strategically on the basis of required outputs and outcomes and on the basis of evidence-driven programmes.
- A systematic framework for assessment of offenders family needs is required both at the outset of the offender journey and over time in order that services can be optimally configured to fit with needs and timing. This will require moves to collect the necessary data.
- Effective targeting will be key. Discrete segments of offenders with clusters of needs should be identified and services developed with a view to moving individuals through a sequence of interventions designed to build closeness to family, reframe parental and family responsibilities, address drivers of offending behaviour and equip individuals with the life, relationship and work skills to play a positive role not only in the family but in society.
- NOMS segmentation model speaks to the strengths of family interventions. When used alongside information about family circumstances obtained from partnership and co-commissioning approaches, it can help target case work based support and transformational interventions on those offenders with higher risk of re-offending, or most likely to be responsive.
- Ultimately a whole family holistic approach is required in which a wide range of public and voluntary organisations come together to tackle the complex drivers of entrenched disadvantage and offending behaviour.



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