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THE NEEDS AND EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG FATHERS
IN PRISON

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
Birkbeck, University of London for the award of Doctor of
Philosophy

May 2021

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification, and that it is the result of my own independent work.

Joanna Louise Knudson Blackwell

Joanna Louise Knudson Blackwell

28th May 2021

Date

ABSTRACT

Since fathers were problematised socially, culturally, politically, and economically in the 1980s and 1990s there has been a surge of research into fathering and fatherhood. However, much of this research has been based around two dominant constructs of fathers: the traditional breadwinner and the new nurturing father. The research narratives have focused on how fathers should not only provide financially for their children, but also how they should be more nurturing and avoid being a so-called 'deadbeat dad'. As part of this father research there has been some interest in fathers in prison, and some interest in teen or young fathers. However, there has been little research into the experiences of teen/young fathers in prison, and their perceptions of fatherhood. When fathers have been examined from every angle, the silence around these men is resounding. Estimates suggest a quarter of young males in prison are fathers, or fathers to be, yet what happens when young fathers are imprisoned has been largely neglected. This is a forgotten cohort.

To increase understanding of the needs and experiences of these men, I undertook a qualitative study using semi-structured narrative interviews with young men in prison who were fathers, or fathers to be. Overall, they were happy and proud about being fathers and had their own ideas about what being a good dad was. They all expressed a desire to be seen as a 'good dad'. However, in addition to their imprisonment they faced a variety of obstacles to achieving this desire, from poor relationships to a lack of legal knowledge to a self-imposed stasis on their fatherhood while in prison. This thesis discusses the needs and experiences of these young men, whether current policy meets those needs and experiences, and makes recommendations for improvements.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In 2007 I decided to do an evening course on The Psychology of Criminal Behaviour at Birkbeck, University of London. I wanted to write a crime novel and though it would be good research. Now, with a Certificate of Higher Education in Criminology, and a Masters in Criminal Law and Criminal Justice under my belt, I am submitting this PhD. I still haven't written the crime novel.

This thesis would not have happened without the continued support of my husband, David. He has patiently listened to me trying to explain complex points of theory, never complained when I locked myself away in the study most weekends, and provided encouragement when I felt like I would never quite finish.

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I also wish to thank the staff of the various charities I spoke to when researching this subject, and the staff at the prison where I undertook the research. For privacy reasons I cannot divulge their names here, but I will be forever grateful.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

While official data about the parenting status of prisoners is not routinely collected (Meek, 2011, p. 941), it is estimated that around a quarter of young males in prison are fathers, or about to become fathers (Families Need Fathers, n.d.). There is also an acknowledged correlation between teenage fatherhood and juvenile offending (Nurse, 2002; Unruh, Bullis & Yovanoff, 2004; Shade et al., 2013). Estimates suggest young offenders are “six times more likely to be fathers than non-offenders of the same age” (Dennison & Lyon, 2001, cited in Ladlow & Neale, 2016, p. 113). Yet research into what happens when young fathers are imprisoned has been largely neglected. This is in stark contrast to the wealth of research about fathers and fatherhood in general, particularly since the 1980s and 1990s, when fathers and male parenting were “discussed and problematised” (Eräranta & Moisander, 2011, p. 509). This problematisation led to fathers being examined from a range of academic disciplines and cultural perspectives, including feminism of various ideologies; fathers’ rights; critical studies of men and masculinities; children’s studies; psychology and psychiatry; sociology; politics; law; economics and others. Discussion about fathers and fatherhood still occurs today, even in a very different political landscape to the 1980s and 1990s. Despite this intense focus on fathers, young fathers in prison remain largely absent from research. This raises a fundamental question – why have young fathers in prison been overlooked?

The last four decades of research into fatherhood, I would argue, suggests that politicians, economists, psychologists, sociologists, feminists, lawyers, and professionals from a wealth of disciplines have been extremely concerned about fathers and how they should be managed. This concern has resulted in debates about ‘good’ and ‘bad’ fathers. There has also been a focus on ‘absent fathers’, who, according to much of the research, fit firmly into the ‘bad’ category and have been problematised and seen as “a root cause of many of the ills of society” (Eräranta & Moisander,

2011, p. 509). Absent fathers as bad dads have been highlighted in the dominant narratives through the emergence of the so-called 'deadbeat dad', "a pejorative description for separated and divorced fathers who withdraw emotional and financial support from their children" (Presbury et al., 1997, p. 135). This problematisation of the absent father, the 'deadbeat dad', led to changes in UK Government policy, such as the introduction of the Child Support Act 1991, and the founding of the (now defunct) Child Support Agency in 1993, which sought to solve the problem of absent dads by penalising them if they did not pay for their children. However, discussions about fathers did not end with the introduction of new policies. By the late 1990s, fresh avenues of research suggested there was now a 'crisis' in fatherhood as men struggled to understand what being a responsible, contemporary father entailed (Doherty, Kouneski & Erickson, 1998, p. 277; Meah & Jackson, 2016, p. 3). Fathers had shifted from being 'deadbeat dads' who did not care or pay for their children, to being at the centre of a perceived crisis that, "involves competing and conflicting social politics that revolve around the dimensions of cash and care" (Hobson, 2002, p. 3). Essentially two dominant models of fatherhood, the traditional breadwinner head of the family father (cash), and the new and nurturing father (care) came into conflict, socially, politically, and economically. These discussions continued, with diverse disciplines seeking to determine what it meant to be a father against a backdrop of political, cultural, and economic change. Yet the silence around young fathers in prison during this period has been deafening. In an era where, "it has been possible to detect a heightening of concern about whether families need fathers and, if so, what kinds of fathers these should be" (Collier & Sheldon, 2008, p. 1), perhaps the absence of young fathers in prison from the narratives indicates that they are not needed, or that they are not the right kind of father. Or is it simply that no one cares?

There have been pockets of research into teen and young fathers, much of which will be examined later in this chapter. However, this pales into insignificance when compared with the research undertaken, particularly in the 1980s, into teen and young mothers who had also been problematised as a symbol of declining social mores (Phoenix, 1991; Miller, 1997, p. 55). Most studies into teenage

or adolescent pregnancies during this time looked only at the mother, without even considering the father (Gavin et al., 2002; Futris & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2007). Little more than a decade ago research suggested that relatively little was known about the parenting and co-parenting experiences of teenage parents and even less about teenage fathers (Herzog et al., 2007). As Speak et al., (1997, p. 1) stated:

Little is known about the role of young single fathers in the formation of such new families or about the barriers they may have to overcome if they wish to participate in their children's upbringing.

There is little evidence to suggest why this may be, other than that young dads have been seen merely as “culprits” and not useful as fathers (Parke, Power & Fisher, 1980, cited in Cutrona et al., 1998, p. 369). It has also been suggested that young men are not considered worthy research subjects and their concerns and needs as young parents are, “often left unaddressed” (Miller, 1997, p. 66).

During the 1990s there was emerging research into fathers within different environments, including prison, which is discussed later. Would young fathers be included here? Unfortunately, not. While there were small pockets of research into young fathers in prison, most fatherhood and prison research tended to focus on male identity and masculinity, the efficacy of fathering education programmes, and the impact of having an imprisoned male parent on his offspring. This contrasts with the literature on mothers in prison, which tends to portray a more sympathetic view of a mother's role as a parent, as this quote from a report by the former Children's Commissioner for England into prison mother and baby units neatly summarises:

There is a need to achieve a balance between, on the one hand, the use of prison to address crime and keep society safe and, on the other hand, to do whatever is best for highly

vulnerable women in view of their role in bringing up the next generation (Aynsley-Green, 2008, p. 3).

It would be challenging, if not impossible, to find a similar quote about young fathers in prison.

Admittedly, over the past two decades, research into young fathers in prison has increased, but it is reasonable to suggest there remains a significant gap in understanding these young men and their experiences and needs as fathers. At the very highest level, that is the gap that this research endeavours to fill.

1.2 RESEARCH AIMS

I was compelled to undertake this research project when, while studying part time for an MA in Criminal Law and Criminal Justice, I read about the statistically significant number of young men in prison who were fathers or about to become fathers (Families Need Fathers, n.d.). I found the absence of their needs and experiences from the wider narratives about fathers fascinating. Questions began to arise: were young fathers in prison not seen as a problem, were they not as interesting as young mothers, were they not the 'right' kind of fathers, or was it that they had just been ignored? These questions acted as a 'springboard' for this social research project (Bryman, 2016), which aims to answer those questions by examining the literature they are so clearly absent from, but also examining how young fathers in prison perceive and experience fatherhood, and what needs they have as imprisoned fathers. The intention is to increase the understanding of this group of fathers and, consequently, to assess whether current UK policy adequately attends to their needs. This will lead to recommendations for improvements in this area.

I note that at the outset of this study I had written the following as potential research aims and questions:

- To examine how young, imprisoned fathers cope with or manage fatherhood

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- To find out if it's possible to 'father' from prison
- Does prison allow men to be fathers?
- Do father intervention programmes work?
- What are the current policies and are they working for fathers?
- What strategies do young men use to father from prison?
- What resources are available to them?

Having examined some of the existing research I was also interested in the social construction of fathers, and how it foregrounds the concept of fatherhood. From previous notes I began to form the research aims, which broadly fit into three main themes: perceptions and experiences, the needs of being a father in prison, and policies, as outlined below:

- What perceptions of fatherhood do young, imprisoned men have? Do they have their own constructions of what fathering is? How does this differ from current social constructions of fathers? What does it mean to be a father when you are in prison? What are their experiences of being a father in prison?
- How do young men 'father' from prison? Is it realistic to learn parenting/fathering skills while in prison? Are prisons set up to allow young men to father or are they disconnected even further from their children? What do young men need to parent from prison?
- What are the current policies around young fathers in the UK criminal justice system? Is a young man's parenting status taken into account during sentencing? Should young men who are fathers be given custodial sentences? Should young men in prison have the right to see their children, or should their children be kept away from the prison environment?

It is from these three main research aims that the rest of the project developed.

It is pertinent to highlight that, while one of the research aims is to look at whether young men in prison have the 'right' to see their children, this is not a fathers' rights study. The issue of fathers'

rights, particularly the “increasingly militant fatherhood lobby” (Collier, 2014, p. 59) is scrutinised in the literature review as part of my examination into the discourse around fatherhood. Fathers’ rights are also examined within the context of the participants’ individual stories. While fathers’ rights are a small element of this study, it is not a fathers’ rights study per se.

1.3 THESIS STRUCTURE

Having formulated the research aims, I chose to undertake qualitative research using semi-structured narrative interviews with young fathers in prison. This decision was grounded in a social constructionist framework, see [Chapter 3: Methodology](#). After transcribing these interviews, I used a thematic analytical approach within an interpretivist framework to identify and examine patterns within the data. This thesis is the result of that research and analysis and is structured in the following way.

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. In this introductory chapter I have attempted to answer the question, “What is this thesis about?” (Murcott, 1997) as well as discuss why I have chosen this topic and the research aims (Silverman, 2017, p. 454). The second chapter concerns the literature review, in which I examine the extant literature about fathers and fathers in prison and discuss some of the theoretical frameworks that exist around fatherhood. In chapter three I explain the methodological approach to the research, discuss the research itself, and introduce the 15 participants whose stories form the backbone of this thesis. During the thematic analysis of the interview data four patterns or themes emerged, each of these is covered in a separate chapter, comprising chapters four to seven. Chapter eight provides an overview of recommendations made from the research and concludes the thesis.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Those undertaking a social research project must be familiar with the literature that already exists around the subject in order to build on it, but not to “go over the same ground” (Bryman, 2016, p. 6).

I embarked on this chapter intending to review the literature around the subject of young fathers in prison. Two challenges arose from this approach. Firstly, the literature around this subject is sparse, which I will cover in due course. Secondly, in order to critically examine the needs and experiences of young fathers in prison, I needed to understand what is meant by the concept of fatherhood.

Examining fatherhood as a concept became my starting point. Foregrounded by the concept of fatherhood is the social construction of fathers, so I chose to review the literature through a social constructionist lens (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Gergen, 1992; Le Gresley, 2001; Gregory & Milner, 2011; Santos, 2015). I chose key texts and authors through searches on the subjects of fathers, fatherhood, fathers in prison, and teen or young fathers within the Birkbeck library and online databases, and search engines such as Google Scholar. These searches identified further relevant texts and authors which I added to a spreadsheet so I could organise them by theme.

Initially, I sought to find a definition of fatherhood within the literature that I could compare with the experiences of young fathers in prison. I soon realised there was a good deal of naivety in this approach. As the rest of this chapter will show, the concept of fatherhood is complex and diverse, shifting and mutating as quickly as the seasons, and there is no one true definition of fatherhood that can be applied to all fathers. While the reproductive act of fathering a child is well defined in biological terms (Johnson, 1999), the social construction of fathers is far more complicated, and is and has been subject to change. As Gillis (2000) comments, “There have always been biological fathers, but fatherhood itself is a social and cultural construct” (p. 227). This complexity manifests itself within the law too, where there are a “variety of understandings on being a parent” (Herring, 2019, p. 360)

and “the law on fatherhood is much more complex [than that on motherhood]” (Ibid., p. 65). This literature review attempts to unpick some of that complexity.

With the fatherhood narratives shifting, overlapping, and changing depending on the discipline or impetus behind the research, I contemplated how best to structure this literature review. As my initial forays into the literature had shown a marked lack of research pre-1945, a slight increase during the 1960s and 1970s, then a dramatic upturn during the 1980s and 1990s, I decided to pursue a narrative review (Bryman, 2016, p. 110) and structure it chronologically rather than thematically. I felt this gradual increase in the volume of literature about fathers, from very little pre the 1960s, to considerable amounts post the 1980s, was illustrative of how the constructs of fathers had developed. Literature from each period both confirmed established constructions of fathers and deviated from them, adding nuance and perspective.

Seeking a theoretical framework from within which to analyse the literature I looked at extant theories of fatherhood. However, the complexity of fatherhood as a concept does not, in my view, lend itself to being viewed through one theoretical framework. While I noted a number of attempts by researchers to theorise fatherhood, I decided not to focus on any one particular fatherhood theory. Rather, I sought to take a broader view and examine fatherhood from diverse disciplines, with the intention to show how distinct and often contradictory constructs of fathers are.

Within my literature research I was aware of the growing literature on the critical studies of men and masculinity, or CSMM (see Hearn, 2013). While I did not make a conscious decision not to engage fully with this area of research, I did not interrogate it or use it as a basis from which to examine the concepts of fatherhood. As discussed above I decided to examine fatherhood from a variety of perspectives to highlight the diverse and often competing opinions that surround fatherhood. This does not mean that I do not consider CSMM important, but merely that it was not the main focus of this thesis.

In order to analyse how the social construction of fathers has been translated into policy and law, I will be using Rose & Miller's *Problematics of Government* as a theoretical framework (Rose & Miller, 1992). This framework provides three analytical tools to examine how "political and other authorities" (ibid., p. 173) have sought to govern the constructs of fatherhood. Firstly, the discursive, that is the political rationalities or discourses used for "representing reality, analysing it and rectifying it" (ibid., p. 178). Secondly, the programmatic and how this "representation of reality" is made "into concrete programmes" (Monk, 1998, p. 240). Thirdly, the "technologies of government", through which, "political rationalities and the programmes of government that articulate them become capable of deployment" (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 183). This framework becomes particularly useful when analysing the problematisation of fathers in the 1980s, when the construction of the 'bad' dad led absent fathers to be seen as social problems to be solved. The resulting 'solutions' involved a variety of technologies of government, from public awareness campaigns encouraging men to interact more with their children, to Acts of Parliament that penalise men who don't pay maintenance for their biological children.

It may seem contradictory to use one theory to examine the fatherhood literature when I stated I wanted to look at fatherhood from a variety of theoretical perspectives, rather than just through one theory. I acknowledge there are some limitations to the use of Rose & Miller, most notably that this framework was introduced in 1992 within a very different political climate to today. With this in mind I acknowledge where using the framework to analyse contemporary government policy may be limited, see [2.8 The new millennium](#) for more information. However, overall I believe that Rose & Miller's framework provides a useful set of tools for examining how the literature became translated, or not, into significant policies.

2.2 WHAT IS FATHERHOOD?

What is fatherhood? What does being a father entail? When we talk about adolescent fathers, or imprisoned fathers, or absent fathers, or modern fathers, or good fathers, or bad fathers, what is the established norm that enables us to evaluate or even allude to these many different types of father? How have fathers been constructed so that one father can be seen as 'good', and another seen as 'bad'? What does fatherhood mean beyond providing the necessary biological elements to create a human being? These questions formed the basis for my examination into the research literature on fatherhood and fathers. As aforementioned, my initial attempts to find a definitive answer to the question 'what is fatherhood' was naïve. As this chapter will show there is no one definitive meaning or definition of fatherhood. The general concept of fatherhood is complex and has been constructed by social, political, legal, economic, and cultural influences. That is, it, and motherhood, are, "...both powerful descriptors of the lived experience of individuals and abstract socio-cultural concepts" (Collier & Sheldon, 2008, p. 15). There are various, often contradictory, ideologies of fatherhood that have shifted and re-formed depending on the period in which examined literature was written and on the perspective of the discipline from which the literature was generated.

From a chronological perspective, there was little academic research on fatherhood prior to the 1960s. Fathers had not been problematised; they did not need to be governed. In fact, during this time, "experts focused their attention firmly on mother and child" and there was "little space" given to the role of the father (Lewis, 2002, p. 125). Although there was an increase in research into fathers during the 1960s, it was not until the 1980s that fathers became more visible (Burghes, Clarke & Cronin, 1997; Lewis, 2002). Now fathers were being characterised as absent, violent, or indifferent, with the narrative focused on "deficit fatherhood" (Boswell & Wedge, 2002, p. 30). By the 1990s there was talk of a 'crisis' in fatherhood (Doherty, Kouneski & Erickson, 1998; Meah & Jackson, 2016). This crisis arose, arguably, as a result of the contradictory and complex nature of constructions of fathers and the social policies that ensued. The patriarchal discourse of the father as protector and provider had been juxtaposed against a 'new dad' rhetoric that encouraged fathers to be the

nurturer. Yet there were (and still are) elements of father as provider deeply instilled in culture and, in the UK, in policy (Busby & Weldon-Johns, 2019).

Therefore, is my initial question 'what is fatherhood' unanswerable? Yes, if one requires a distinct answer. No, if one can accept that the answer is multifaceted and subject to change. In addition, rhetoric around fathers and the reality of day-to-day fathering are not one and the same. The constructions of fathers are very different to men's lived experiences. In effect the "culture" of fatherhood greatly differs from the "conduct" (LaRossa, 1988, p. 451). This only serves to make the question 'what is fatherhood' even more complex.

2.3 PRE-WAR

Prior to the Second World War (1939-1945), there was little substantial recorded academic debate about fatherhood. Men in general, and therefore fathers, were not examined. In fact, there was a resounding silence around them, which could be interpreted as an acceptance of the patriarchal status quo. Men and fathers were not seen as a problem, so there was no need to study them or question their behaviours. During the 18th and early 19th centuries a popular consensus was that fathers were the moral overseers of the family and "were viewed as the family's ultimate source of moral teaching and worldly judgements" (Pleck, 1987, pp. 351-352). Within a patriarchal society the man, ergo the father, was the head of the household – socially, legally, and financially – and his main duties were to protect his family and to provide materially for them. He was also seen as the disciplinarian of the household and made any important family decisions. Ideas of fatherhood or fathering were caught up in the "hypothetical universality of gender-differentiated parenting", with fathers being seen as less involved with their children than mothers (Marsiglio & Pleck, 2005, p. 251). Although this was not necessarily true in practice (Ibid.). Adult men were seen as the only ones who had the mental and physical strength to fully administer the needs of the household and, therefore,

the children. Women, ergo mothers, were secondary. Children were viewed as “inherently sinful” and “only men could provide the vigorous supervision required by children” (Pleck, 1987, p. 352).

When parents separated, custody of any children was often given to the father simply because he was the male head of the household. Women were not seen as responsible enough to look after children on their own (Ibid.). The rights of the father were absolute (Brophy, 1985). It was not until the Custody of Infants Act 1839 that mothers were given limited rights to petition courts for custody of children under the age of seven (Ibid.), and the Custody of Infants Act 1873, allowed some mothers to have custody of, or access to, any children under the age of 16 after a separation, but not in all circumstances. While this was hardly a dramatic reversal of fathers’ rights in favour of mothers, it does show a “specific form of state intervention into the family” (Brophy, 1985, p. 14), which recurs in later decades as the state became more involved in programmes that affected both mothers and fathers.

The Industrial Revolution is widely held by sociologists as a time when fathers started to become marginalised from the home (Pleck, 1987, p. 354; Gillis, 2000, p. 229; Meah & Jackson, 2016, p. 3). Men went to work in factories and businesses, often leaving women at home to look after the household and children. As women/mothers became more involved in managing the home, the father’s role became more about providing financially for the family (Cabrera et al., 2000; Coley, 2001). Men were seen as breadwinners but emotionally distant (Doherty, Kouneski & Erickson, 1998), with women providing the emotional care. However, this was predominately a “middle-class phenomenon” (Gillis, 2000, p. 229). The movement of men out of the home and into the world of work would, according to some, not affect the “aristocracy and lower orders” (Ibid., p. 230), although the ‘lower orders’ were also working in factories. Equally, it was predominately the privileged middle-class who could “dispense with the labour of its children” (Allen, 2005, p. 10) as many working-class children worked and could be seen as breadwinners too. For the idealised middle-class father though, “fatherhood had become a matter of evenings, weekends”, where “fathers played the role, not as the

patriarchs of old, but as the newly invented Santa figure, the ultimate provider, but still very much a stranger” (Gillis, 2000, p. 230).

This construct of father as provider trickled out into all aspects of society, including pre-War advertising, which depicts father as a bowler-hatted worker with mother in an apron looking after the house and children (Pleck, 1987, p. 354). This framing of fatherhood in middle-class terms is indicative of much of the historical discourse around fathers, particularly the father as breadwinner narrative. Middle-class men had the ability to fulfil their roles as providers, making “their fatherhood seem less problematic than that of working-class men” (Gillis, 2000, p. 230). Note how the narrative concentrates on a certain type of father, that is the middle-class father, who is not seen as a problem as he is able to fulfil the role that has been constructed for him as economic provider. Those who do not fit this construction, in particular working-class men, are left out of the story. And there are no discussions at all about those men whose lives are completely opposite to the construct of the working family man and head of the household, such as men in prison.

If fathers were not seen as a problem during this period, it was a different story for mothers. With a decrease in population and birth rates after the First World War, (Allen, 2005, p. 10) there was an increasing moral pressure on women to do their maternal duty and have children. The increase in married women taking employment outside the home was seen as a “problem to be managed” (Allen, 2014, p. 39). Moralists were concerned about the “integrity of the family” (Ibid., p. 64). Women who did not have children were seen as incomplete or deviant by a society still reeling from the effects of war. Government campaigns were aimed at encouraging women to remain at home and have children, making gender divisions within the family even more pronounced, as men were encouraged into the most lucrative jobs so they could provide for the women having babies at home (Allen, 2014, p. 44). When discussing the setting up of the Welfare State, the Beveridge Report (Beveridge, 1942) made the assumption that women would be homemakers and fathers and men would be the breadwinners (Child Poverty Action Group, 2008). While this focus on mothers and motherhood led

to much discussion among feminist thinkers about the “practical difficulties, painful choices, and emotional conflicts – in fact the maternal dilemma” (Allen, 2005, p. 64), women wanting to work faced, there was little written about how fathers could help to solve this dilemma. Feminist literature from this period has not been examined exhaustively for this thesis but during my initial research I could only find one reference to fathers. In 1927, feminist Vera Brittain said men had to realise their “...parental responsibilities” to help support the feminist cause and that:

The mere handing over of a weekly check does not adequately dispose of such responsibilities; the majority of children would benefit greatly by seeing more of their fathers (Allen, 2014, p. 39, citing Brittain, 1927, p. 365).

Comments about fathering responsibilities beyond providing financially were rare. To reiterate, mothers were seen as the problem here, not fathers.

From the legal perspective there were legislative changes during the pre-War period that appeared to increase the rights of women. These, inevitably, led to the restriction of some rights to men, and therefore fathers. For example, prior to the Married Women’s Property Act 1882, when a man and woman married, they became ‘one person’ in the eyes of the law. After the Act, women’s legal identities were restored, and a married couple could be seen as two separate people. Additionally, the Matrimonial Causes Act 1937 allowed women to petition for divorce on the same basis as men for the first time. The rights of the husband and father were no longer absolute. However, family law at the time only affected legitimate children and in common law, illegitimate children had no legal relationship with their father, who equally could not claim custody of a child born outside marriage. Despite the changes to divorce laws, legitimacy remained a key component in a father/child relationship, instilling the importance of the family unit within law. It was not until the Family Law Reform Act 1987 that legal distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate children were finally lifted (Lowe & Douglas, 1998). Equally, it was not until amendments to the Guardianship of Infants Act were introduced in 1973, that both parents had equal rights to decide on a child’s development and

upbringing. While there had been changes, in many ways the man remained head of the family both figuratively and legally.

To pose the question 'what is fatherhood' during the pre-War period would perhaps illicit the response that the main role of fatherhood is one of economic provider and moral overseer. Men (specifically middle-class men) were fulfilling this role by popping on their bowler hat in the morning, grabbing their umbrella, and going off to work. While on the periphery men were affected by the growing feminism movement, and the changing of laws to allow women, and therefore mothers, greater rights, there was no direct assault on the construction of fathers as breadwinners, moral disciplinarians, and providers. And there was no indication that fathers were a problem that needed to be solved. Using Rose & Millers *Problematics of Government* framework to analyse this period it is really women and mothers who are the subject of the "changing discursive fields within which the exercise of power is conceptualised" (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 175). Particularly when that concept of power concerns how the family is governed. During the post-War period and the introduction of Welfarism, changes to family dynamics were beginning, though initially it was still mothers that bore the brunt of the "specific problematisations" that arose, namely "the declining birthrate; delinquency and anti-social behaviour; the problem family" (Ibid., p. 192).

2.4 POST-WAR

The post-War period was, according to some, an "important juncture in the social construction of men's care-giving roles" (LaRossa, 2004, p. 47), but it was also a very complex time. As parenting roles within the family began to shift, the function of the father started to be questioned. During the war, with men away fighting, women – specifically middle-class women – had started to work to provide for their families and to boost the war effort. Working-class women had tended to already be in work. When men returned from war, some women, bolstered by a newfound confidence and independence, were not content to return to the status quo and continued to work. In some families

the man's financial contributions became less important as women were contributing too, and the idea of the father as main breadwinner and provider was being challenged. If fathers were no longer the providers, what were they? This challenge to the established order was causing concern among social commentators, politicians and within the growing discipline of psychotherapy. Yet it was not fathers who were scrutinised, it was mothers. These working women, many of them mothers, were presenting a social problem and thus were becoming problematised. Women were becoming "objects of social unease" (Kimmel, 1986, cited in Pleck, 1987, p. 356). What would happen to society if women went out to work and there was no one at home to care for and nurture the children? Many predicted a social disaster (Cohen, 1993).

Discussions from within psychotherapy and psychology began to emphasise the importance of motherhood in child development. This aligned with an increased focus on child welfare and how a child's early years could affect the rest of their lives. A growing number of experts in parenting, medicine and sociology were telling women how to be 'good' mothers, and therefore good citizens. I would argue that this growth in expertise "emerged as a possible solution to a problem that confronted liberal mentalities of government" (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 188). That is that these experts had highlighted mothers as the problem behind many perceived social ills and they were being situated as integral to a child's healthy development. For example, Bowlby's "maternal deprivation hypotheses" concluded that the mother/infant relationship was unique and vitally important. A child must have a strong and warm relationship with a mother (or mother substitute) in order to develop and maintain good mental health (Bowlby, 1952). This framing led to techniques of government, such as an increase in child rearing advice and information. It also shows how the private life of the family became a "vital locale for the government of the economic life of the nation; 'private' family was to be a resource for the government of social life" (Rose & Miller, 1992, pp. 187-188). In other words, encouraging good mothering within the family, would lead to social and economic benefits; men back in work; women running homes so no need for childcare support, etc. Within this expert advice fathers never entered the equation. For example, the first edition of Dr Spock's hugely popular 1946

book on parenting, *The Common Sense Book Of Baby And Child Care*, concentrated almost entirely on mothers, and had just nine pages on fathers (Spock, 1946). And the topic of fathers was not listed in any of the 1950s-era books about the family (Segal, 1990). Parenting meant mothering and the focus was once again on the mother as primary caregiver.

While little was said directly about fathers during this time, there were some commentators – particularly in the field of psychology – who stressed the importance of the father as a sex role model. This was in response to a perceived “excessive mothering” (Pleck, 1987, p. 356), the idea that mothers were overly dominant in childrearing. This “helped usher in a new perception of the father’s direct importance in child rearing as a sex role model” (Ibid.). The father role was seen as a way for male children in particular to “acquire strong masculine identities or sex roles” (Biller, 1974, 1993, cited in Lamb & Tamis-Lemonda, 2004, p. 7). This was the first time the idea of “involved fatherhood” had a “significant impact on the culture” (Pleck, 1987, p. 356). This shows how the narrative about fathers as providers was starting to shift to one where a father’s involvement in their child’s development was also seen as important. While some felt the construction of fathers only as breadwinners, “reached its heyday in the 1950s” (Janssens, 1997, p. 7), others felt, “the distant father-breadwinner still prevailed” (Pleck, 1987, p. 356). Others noted the beginning of a schism in fatherhood, where “fathers were made fun of, and they were also revered” (LaRossa, 2004, p. 52). I would argue here that any changes to the way fathers were viewed were hardly seismic, but this period did sow the seeds for what came next. As the 1950s gave way to the 1960s and the second wave of feminism, feminist thinkers believed women were more powerful than men within the family. If women could both provide for their children, and nurture them, then why were men needed at all? This added a new layer of complexity to any discussions about the meaning of fatherhood.

2.5 THE 1960S TO THE 1980S

From the 1960s onwards there was an increase in interest in the role of men and fathers within the family. This was in response to the social trends taking place at the time, most noticeably the continued “movement of mothers into the workforce” (Bronstein & Cowen, 1988, p. 4). While previously women would not choose to work outside the home, by the 1970s, many women would not choose to be in the home (Segal, 1990). By 1985 “71% of women of childbearing age were in the labour force” (Bronstein & Cowen, 1988, p. 4), although this was largely in low-paying or part-time jobs. With more women in work and sharing the responsibility as breadwinner, fathers were being urged to become more active in some aspects of childcare (Segal, 1990; Lanier, 1993). Between 1975 and 1981 time spent by fathers on childcare and household tasks “increased 10-30%”, although that was still only about a third of the time mothers spent on the same tasks (Radin & Goldsmith, 1983, cited in Bronstein & Cowen, 1988, p. 5). Some men were also starting to take an active role in pregnancy and childbirth, attending births in hospitals and accompanying their partners to antenatal classes (Boswell & Wedge, 2002). It was largely “as a reflection of the social changes that were occurring” that “researchers began to give much more direct attention to the role of the father in the family” (Bronstein & Cowen, 1988, p. 6). Social scientists were seen to have ‘rediscovered fathers’ and there began an increase in research into men and masculinities (Bronstein & Cowen, 1988; Cohen, 1993).

At the same time, the psychological attachment theories about children and mothers that had been so popular in the immediate post-War years were being questioned. The idea that fathers were just as important as mothers when it came to care and child development was circulating (Segal, 1990). Feminist psychologists saw more involved fathering as benefitting not just children, but women too (Phares, 1996; Silverstein, 1996, cited in Doherty, Kouneski & Erickson, 1998, p. 277). Other research suggested that women who took on all the childcare duties within a home were more prone to depression, so the sharing of childcare duties was recommended (Segal, 1990). In popular culture fathers were being depicted as more nurturing and caring than their career-driven wives (Segal, 1990). The social construct of the hands-on ‘new father’ was emerging.

Yet by the mid-1980s feminist thinkers were discussing the idea that this 'new father' was a myth. Research showed men did not do many of the things they had been recommended to do (Segal, 1990). Women were still doing more caregiving than men, despite the perceived shift in ideological thinking (Bronstein & Cowen, 1988, p. 384). Socialist feminist Lynne Segal argues that there are several reasons for this disparity between attitude and action, not just that men were incapable of helping at home, a train of thought she insists came from a branch of, "disillusioned feminists" (Segal, 1990, p. 29). For example, the way the workplace was set up, with long working hours and a lack of flexibility, encouraged men to work, not women. Because men were able to develop their careers and earn more, women were more likely to sacrifice their careers to look after a baby. It was patriarchal society as well as individual men, and therefore fathers, that was causing this gap between the real and the ideal.

Other commentators suggested changes were needed in the workplace to enable men to take on a more nurturing role at home. Cohen (1993) stated that becoming a father had a profound and dramatic effect on men and that they would undertake a more caring role within the household if they could. Yet despite this increased interest in fathers, they had not yet been problematised. That role still fell to mothers, although the 'problem' of mothers was now lone mothers, and particularly teenage mothers (Phoenix, 1991; Nurse, 2002). At the same time, although "the issues of father's rights have been in evidence for some time" (Collier & Sheldon, 2006, p. 7), since the 1970s there had been an "increased intensity" to debates around father's rights (Ibid.). Feminist thinkers believed this was part of a "reaction to increased female power within and beyond the family" (Ibid., p. 8). While there are counter arguments to this narrative – for example the increase in women's right did not necessarily equate to a decrease in men's rights – it's noteworthy that the concept of father's rights had more prominence during this period.

I suggest that the 1960s through to the early-1980s is important in an examination of fatherhood as it lays the foundations for the following dramatic changes. I would argue that it's during these years

that the discursive elements were leading to the formation of the “political rationalities” that became so prominent during the 1980s (Rose & Miller, 1992), and the programmes and technologies of government that followed.

2.6 PROBLEM DADS

The 1960s and 1970s saw substantial social change within the family home and the workplace. With more women in work men might have been the main breadwinners but they were no longer the sole breadwinners. The traditional father as breadwinner construct was being challenged. Lone parent families were becoming more common and marriage rates were dropping so new ‘types’ of father were beginning to be defined, such as the non-resident father, the stepfather or the social father. Previously father absence had been seen to be due to work, illness or crime, now non-marital births and divorce or separation were more common (Bradshaw et al., 1999, p. 125). This led to an “alarming rate of father-absent families” (Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 1999, p. 2). Note the use of the term ‘alarming’ here to describe the situation. These changes within society and the so-called ‘rediscovery of fathers’ coincided with an increased pressure on the Welfare State, and a growing social welfare bill (Maclean, 1994, p. 510). In 1988 lone parent families made up 16% of all families with children in the UK and of these, 90% were headed by mothers (Ermisch & Wright, 1991, p. 424). Of these lone parents, 60% received welfare benefits, known as Income Support at the time (Ibid.). This was in contrast to 1961, where just 6% of families were headed by a lone parent, with one in five of these families reliant on state benefit (Maclean, 1994, p. 512). By the mid-1980s, experts were:

Creating a new body of work that focuses on expanded definitions of father (e.g., biological vs. social), typologies of father involvement, and measures of father involvement and father-child relationships (Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 1999, p. 2).

When the Conservative Party came into power in the UK under Margaret Thatcher in 1979, there was a call to decrease public expenditure and consequently the influence of the State (Hills, 1998, p. 2). I

would argue that the political rationalities or discourses for, “representing reality, analysing it and rectifying it” (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 178) were being set as absent fathers were starting to be seen in certain circles as the problem behind the increase in the social welfare bill and poor child development. This led to a programmatic response or “realm of designs... that seek to configure specific locales and relations in ways thought desirable” (Ibid., p. 181). In other words, the discursive political rationalities were being translated into “an expression of a particular concern in another modality” (Ibid., p. 181), that is “an explosion” in fathering research (Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999, p. 397).

I would argue that these designs or programmes produced “theories and explanations” (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 182) that would conceptualise two conflicting models of fatherhood, first the traditional economic breadwinner or ‘cash’ model, and second, the new father or ‘care’ model. These concepts would then make fathers more “amenable to management” (Ibid.). At the apex of these two models was the construct of the absent or ‘deadbeat’ dad, a father who didn’t provide financially for his children, let alone help care for them. Previously the alleged decline of civilisation had been blamed on working or teen mothers. Now social problems such as a rise in anti-social behaviour were being blamed on absent fathers who, in the UK were depicted as “feckless ne’er-do-wells, passing on their responsibilities to the taxpayer” (Bradshaw et al., 1999, p. 125). Here was the ultimate bad dad who was to blame for not taking responsibility for his children, even though this was a time of high unemployment with fewer men able to work. While the problematisation of absent fathers was taking shape, they were invisible when it came to policy. It was only as the 1980s progressed that these research programmes were translated into the “intellectual machinery” for government that ushered in policies that were perceived as solving this now identifiable problem (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 182).

At the same time the law was casting a more critical eye on the family and, in particular, the needs of the child. The Matrimonial & Family Proceedings Act 1984 started to put the child’s interest first in divorce cases (Lowe & Douglas, 1998). This highlighted a step change in policy and legislation around

family law, where the needs of the child became paramount. This did not mean that the rights of the parents were forgotten, however. Indeed, they were now seen through the lens of the child's best interests. While fathers no longer had 'absolute power' within the family, the idea that it was in a child's best interests to have their father in their lives became part of the agenda for fathers' rights groups, particularly when it came to contact negotiations post separation and divorce. Criminal justice expert Charles Lanier cited experts who acknowledged, "the importance of the father and his contribution to the healthy development of his child" (Hamilton, 1977; Lamb, 1978, Weinraub, 1978, cited in Lanier, 1993, p. 51). This started to build the construct of father as carer. While supporters of non-resident fathers used this new ideology to further their cause, there was also a resurgence in more traditional thinking. Neoconservatives believed that many of society's problems at the time were caused by the lack of a father and that, "responsible fathering is most likely to occur within the context of heterosexual marriage" (Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999, p. 397). This was a key theme in neoliberal thinking too as it converged with neoconservatism.

The Thatcher (and subsequent Major) Conservative Governments in the UK blamed absent fathers for many of society's issues, with Thatcher claiming in 1990, that "no father should be able to escape his responsibility" (Bradshaw et al., 1999, p. 126, citing National Children's Homes George Thomas Society Lecture, 17 January 1990). In Thatcher's autobiography she noted she was, "appalled by the way in which men fathered a child and then absconded" (Herring, 2019, citing Thatcher, 1995, p. 630). Thatcher in particular wanted to instil a neoliberal culture of individual responsibility into society, with marriage and the so-called traditional family as the backbone, as Maclean (1994) neatly summarises:

Families were to take responsibility for their members instead of turning to the State.

Traditional family forms were to be preferred, with two parents, one exercising the bread-winning public skills and the other providing possibly some income but predominantly concerned with nurture and care. Other forms of family life, such as the one-parent family,

were associated with deviance and failure to prepare children to play a responsible part in the enterprise society (McClellan, 1991, p. 512).

As a result, the debate around family and how it had changed had, “vilified both lone mothers and non-resident fathers” (Bradshaw et al., 1999, p. 125) who did not fit into this idealised family model. Absent dads and single mums were embarrassing for a Government wanting to reduce welfare payments as single-parent families were more likely to claim state benefits (Ermisch & Wright, 1991). These initial programmatic forays into defining and problematising absent fathers had provided “procedures for rendering the world thinkable, taming its intractable reality by subjecting it to the disciplined analysis of thought” (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 182). In other words, these programmes had defined the problem, now it was time to look to the technologies of government to see how the problem of absent dads could be solved. Note here that, within the neoliberal thinking of the time, this “governmentality perspective has been utilised... in relation to neoliberal – or ‘advanced liberal’ – modes of governance” (Pyysiäinen, Halpin & Guilfoyle, 2017), in other words, Rose & Miller’s concept of governmentality is particularly pertinent at this time.

The question had been raised. How could the Government force absent fathers to be responsible, and thereby reduce the social welfare bill? By the 1990s this surge in fatherhood research was “beginning to link research to policy” (Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 1999, p. 2). The Children Act 1989 was, arguably, the first result of this link.

The introduction of the Children Act in 1989 was a seminal moment in the history of child and family law. The then Lord Chancellor, Lord Mackay of Clashfern, called it, “the most comprehensive and far-reaching reform of child law which has come before Parliament in living memory” (HL Deb (6 December 2000). The Act officially placed child welfare at the heart of family law for the first time and defined guidelines around the responsibilities of parents. As the Lord Chancellor commented, “The prime responsibility for the upbringing of children rests with the parents”, but where the State

needed to intervene it, “should be arranged in voluntary partnership with the parents, and the children enabled to continue their relationship with their families where possible” (Ibid.).

In addition, for the first time, parental responsibility was laid out in legal terms. As the Lord Chancellor said:

The fundamental concept in this area of law is no longer to be expressed variously in terms of rights, duties, authority or even powers of parents, but simply as ‘parental responsibility’ (Ibid.).

The Act defined parental responsibility as, “all the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority which by law a parent of a child has in relation to the child and his property” (Children Act 1989, Section 3(1)), although it must be noted that parental responsibility does not mean the rights of the parent are absolute, they could be overturned. Where this definition of parental responsibility may be seen to provide a framework for parents, it had far reaching effects on fathers, as the Act, “restricts which fathers might obtain parental responsibility” (Herring, 2019, p. 398). In line with the neoliberal view of the traditional family at the heart of society, fathers who were not married to the mother of their child or children did not get parental responsibility as an automatic right. In contrast, gestational mothers had automatic parental responsibility for their children whether married or not. Fathers had two ways to gain parental responsibility: either via the mother if they were married or if they were not married but had agreed a ‘parental responsibility agreement’, or via the courts, if the father had been granted a court order that allowed him parental responsibility (Children Act 1989, Section 4). Whether fathers should automatically get parental responsibility has been the subject of much debate, particularly as, as Sheldon (2001) notes:

Whilst the intention behind the Children Act may have been one of encouraging greater parental responsibility, in practice the impact of the provisions is largely to allocate parental

rights (whether exercisable against the State or the other parent) to make certain decisions with regard to the upbringing of children (Sheldon, 2001, p. 94).

Parental responsibility became a key discussion point in debates from both the fathers' rights movement, and the women's rights movement. Within the realms of fathers' rights, the suggestion has been that the law was discriminatory against unmarried fathers and potentially in breach of the European Convention of Human Rights, which, in "Art. 8 requires a respect for family life and art. 14 provides that rights and freedoms under the ECHR shall be secured "without discrimination on any ground such as sex [...], birth or other status"" (Sheldon, 2001, p. 94). Meanwhile feminist campaigners vehemently opposed recognising unmarried fathers automatically as there was a fear that "men may use rights over their children in order to threaten or harass their ex-partners" and that "greater parental rights given to unmarried fathers could considerably worsen the difficulties faced by women and children fleeing domestic violence" (Ibid., p.117). The debate around automatic parental responsibility continued throughout the decade after the introduction of the Act, culminating in a consultation exercise in 1998 by the Lord Chancellor's Department that led to the UK Government announcing:

...its intention to reform the law relating to parental responsibility so that the unmarried father who jointly registers the birth with the mother will acquire parental responsibility automatically (Sheldon, 2001, p. 93).

Section 4 of the Children Act 1989 was amended by the Adoption and Children Act 2002 to reflect these changes, among others not specific to fathers. This increased the number of unmarried fathers who had parental responsibility as, around "80 per cent of births to unmarried couples were registered to both mother and father" (Herring, 2019, p. 398). While a full critique of the Children Act 1989 is out of scope of this research, it is safe to say it was hugely important for the way the family became viewed in law, (Lowe & Douglas, 1998). It became a turning point in family law, putting the needs of the child at the forefront of legal activity within the family and making significant changes to

the way parenting was understood. The Act was seen by some to have introduced the notion of shared parenting (Boswell & Wedge, 2002, p. 12), and encouraged contact between non-resident parents and their children. It could also be argued that as the Act shifted from a parent's 'rights' to a parents 'responsibility' it also encouraged a more emotional relationship between a child and its parents. It's also arguable that these changes from 'rights' to 'responsibility' and a more emotional connection between parents and children made the whole issue of parental responsibility even less clear. While the Act can be seen as encouraging parents to act 'dutifully' towards their children, it can also be interpreted that it was the State's way of showing, "that responsibility for childcare belongs to parents, not the State" (Eekelaar, 1991, p. 27). This clearly represents how technologies of government allow "rule 'at a distance'", (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 184) and that, "the 'private' enterprise was to become a vital locale for the government of the economic life of the nation" (Ibid., p. 187). That is, that the State had defined the rules of parental responsibility while simultaneously removing themselves from that responsibility. In this way they could control or govern parents through the Act while not actively engaging in control.

Following on from the Children Act 1989, the Child Support Act 1991 also changed the face of family law, although arguably in a very different way. The Act has been described as the last piece of legislation "bearing the distinctive hallmarks of the Thatcher administration" (Maclean & Eekelaar, 1993, p. 205), that is having a strong moral aspect and assumptions from both the neoliberal and neoconservative Conservative Party ideologies. These assumptions included the idea that there is only one natural type of family, with the father as head of the household and breadwinner; that the family is an "important site of social control through the exercise of parental authority" (Ibid.) and that the family is "set against the State: it is the main defence of freedom of the individual against the threat of collectivism" (Ibid.). The Act, it can be argued, allowed the State "to hitch its own financial worries to the interests of children" (Maclean & Eekelaar, 1993, p. 213) by equating a parent being responsible for the best interests of their children by providing for them economically. In this way it

sought to solve the problem of the non-resident 'bad' father, the construct of which was "responsible, to some extent, for the way the Child Support Act 1991 was launched" (Bradshaw et al., 1999, p. 125).

While the Act uses the terms 'parents' or 'absent parent' rather than father or mother when talking about maintenance for children who qualified for support under the Act, the fact that 86% of lone parent families in the UK are headed by the mother (Office for National Statistics, 2019), suggests the Act was really aimed at fathers. It firmly placed the emphasis of parenting on economics, that being a responsible parent (and for this we should read father) was about financial support (Herring, 2019, p. 205). For those fathers who did not fit into the traditional resident-father family model, there was now a legal responsibility to pay for their children. This not only reinforced the neoconservative ideology of the ideal 'intact' family, but also reinforced the traditional breadwinner model of fathering – as emotionally distant provider. While, it could be argued, the Children Act 1989 dealt with the 'care' aspect of fathering in that it encouraged contact post parental separation, fathers were not penalised if they did not do so. Neither were they penalised if they did not have parental responsibility. With the Child Support Act, 1991, absent fathers who did not pay for their children were penalised and faced imprisonment. Fathers' rights groups contested this aspect of the Act in relation to the Children Act 1989, saying it was "unfair for men to pay child support, yet have no automatic rights with regard to their children" (Sheldon, 2001, p. 93). In contrast, feminist groups felt both Acts had not gone far enough, and that, "fatherhood was only revealed as problematic for law at the point of divorce or separation" (Collier, 2001, p. 530). In other words, that problem fathers within marriage or co-habiting relationships had not been considered. The Child Support Act 1991 was seen by many as the Conservative Government ushering in policies that pushed for individual responsibility rather than a reliance on the State, and that it took a moral stance on behalf of the taxpayer (Bradshaw et al, 1991, p. 142).

Yet the Act did little to encourage a non-resident father to be more involved with his children, other than economically. For absent dads, child support payments are not involvement (Lewis, 2000). Both

the Child Support Act 1991 and the Children Act 1989 were the Conservative Government's way of addressing the problem of fathers by reconstituting them (Collier, 2001, pp. 528-529). As a result of both Acts, a reconstructed 'new father' emerged, in rhetoric at least. This was a man who was economically responsible for his children and remained a father, with parental responsibility, even post-divorce, or separation. Yet questions remained about whether the policy was being utilised in real life, or whether this was just a way for the Government to socially engineer the family (Smart, 1997; Collier, 2001, p. 530).

The problematisation of fathers and subsequent attempts to 'solve' the problems during this period was not just a UK issue. The USA was also waging a war against 'deadbeat dads' during the 1980s. The US Family Support Act 1988 forced women to declare the paternity of their children in order to claim social security payments and men had to pay for their children up to the age of 18. This Act was introduced by the neoliberal Reagan administration and, rather like the UK legislation brought in by Thatcher's Conservative Government, sought to, "lead to lasting emancipation from welfare dependency" (Reagan, 1988). By the later 1990s the so-called Deadbeat Parents Punishment Act 1998 in the US made it a felony offence to not pay child support, effectively criminalising parents, usually fathers (Baskerville, 2004, p. 487). As in the UK, child support payments in the US were not linked to visitation, meaning the US Government was forcing fathers into the provider rather than the nurturer role.

2.7 THE DEBATE CONTINUES

The introduction of the Children Act 1989 and the Child Support Act 1991 in the UK did not end the debates about fatherhood. In fact, "the 1990s produced a more extensive and eclectic social science literature on numerous aspects of fathering" (Marsiglio et al., 2000, p. 1173). Throughout the 1990s discussions about the two dominant constructs of fathers, the breadwinner construct and the new,

caring father construct continued. I would argue that this shows where, “technologies produce unexpected problems” (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 90). In other words, technologies such as the Child Support Act and the Child Support Agency had done little to ‘solve’ the problem of fathers, and therefore a new wave of programmes was instigated. These programmes tended to concentrate on the conflict between the traditional breadwinner father and the new, caring father.

A significant amount of fatherhood debate came out of the USA in the 1990s. While I am conscious of the need for caution when reviewing research across jurisdictions and societies, it is pertinent to note that there are significant parallels with what was happening in the UK. The US research was largely in response to a memorandum published by the then-President Clinton. Entitled: *Supporting the Role of Fathers in Families*, the memorandum called for, “all executive departments and agencies to review every program, policy, and initiative (hereinafter referred to collectively as “programs”) that pertains to families” (Clinton, 1995) to ensure that fathers had been “meaningfully included” (Ibid.). This memorandum was in response to the problematisation of fathers in the USA, which, as in the UK focused on the ‘problem’ of absent or ‘deadbeat dads’. Clinton started his memorandum by claiming families were at the heart of the future of America, and that he was aware that:

...strengthening fathers’ involvement with their children cannot be accomplished by the Federal Government alone; the solutions lie in the hearts and consciences of individual fathers and the support of the families and communities in which they live (Clinton, 1995).

This is a clear indication that the Democratic Clinton administration was putting the ‘solution’ to deadbeat dads firmly in the hands of individuals and moving governance of them away from the State. In response to this a slew of conferences were organised and papers written from a variety of disciplines (Marsiglio et al, 2000, p. 1174). This culminated in the publication of a 450-page document entitled *Nurturing Fatherhood: Improving Data and Research on Male Fertility, Family Formation and Fatherhood* (Federal Interagency Forum on Child & Family Statistics, 1998) with research from over “100 researchers, policy analysts, and public officials” (Marsiglio et al., 2000, p. 1174). This is a very

clear indication of programmes of government as branches of research undertaken by myriad experts (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 181). A forensic examination of the Nurturing Fatherhood document is out of scope of this research, yet it is pertinent to note that the document highlighted the “alarming rate” of father-absent families (Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 1999, p. 2). At the same time, in 1995, founder and president of the Institute for American Values and co-director of The Marriage Opportunity Council, David Blankenhorn, published his book *Fatherless America*, which stated America’s so-called fatherless society was the “most critical social issue” the USA had ever faced (Blankenhorn, 1995). Blankenhorn, who is widely seen as a key influence in the Clinton administration’s ideology of family in the 1990s (Lancaster & Di Leonardo, 1997, p. 454) discussed how the connection between masculinity and fatherhood had disintegrated. He claimed that in 1990, 36% of children in American did not live with their biological father and said that the ideology of new fathers was not about more hands-on dads, but estranged dads (Blankenhorn, 1995), in other words, new dads were absent dads. Although a supporter of men’s rights, Blankenhorn stated that men left families of their own volition, rather than the more militant fathers’ rights groups who blamed divorce and separation on women leaving marriages too easily (see Braver, 1998, cited in Baskerville, 2004, p. 487). As a campaigner for marriage and traditional values it is not surprising that Blankenhorn claimed matrimony was the key to being a good father and encouraged a return to the more ‘masculine’ man. He suggested men should act as vigilantes within communities, stamping out anti-social behaviour. He also suggested all male schools with all male teaching staff to ensure boys grow up to ‘be men’. For women, he suggested unmarried mothers should give up their children to married couples and that single women should be banned from using sperm banks, to cull the number of single parent families (Blankenhorn, 1995). While many of Blankenhorn’s ideas chafe, they highlight how non-resident fathers were being debated within neoliberal and neoconservative circles. Even more extreme discussions on fathers and their place in the modern American family saw men’s rights campaigners blaming women for fatherless America, claiming, as Baskerville did, rather unpalatably, that women were using domestic violence as a way to discriminate against fathers, as he commented, “Domestic violence is now a

major industry” and, “domestic violence hysteria is aimed specifically at removing children from their fathers” (Baskerville, 2004, p. 1).

From a feminist perspective there was also plenty of discussion around the dominant father ideologies. For example, US feminist psychologist Louise Silverstein argued that limiting fatherhood to the provider role had been, “central to the problem of male privilege, and thus to the subordination of women within society at large” (Silverstein, 1996, p. 4). While Silverstein argued it was important not to “overvalue the importance of fathers” it was also important not to “dismiss their significance” (Ibid., p. 10). She ultimately called for fathers to be redefined in the nurturing role and saw this “redefinition of fathering as thus an essential step in the continuing feminist transformation of patriarchal society” (Ibid., p. 31). However, Silverstein also admitted that the ideology of the nurturant father that was emerging in the 1990s was “a myth rather than a reality” (Ibid., p. 22). This sentiment was echoed by other feminist thinkers, who felt that the new participating father was an “illusion” created by men (Drakich, 1989, p. 69) and that this construct was being used to improve the outcome for men in custody cases, and to develop social policies that benefitted men (Ibid.).

In the USA, one of the technologies of government that arose from these programmes of research was the Deadbeat Parents Punishment Act, 1998. Like the UK’s Child Support Act 1991, it made a parent’s refusal to make court-ordered child support payments a federal offence. On signing the Act, President Clinton said:

One of the main reasons single mothers go on welfare is that fathers have failed to meet their responsibilities to the children... one way or the other – people who don’t support their children will pay what they must (CNN, 1998).

Note how this echoed Thatcher’s comments that men must take responsibility for their children and quite clearly blamed the rising welfare bill on absent fathers.

These debates were being repeated in the UK. In 1994, a review of UK newspapers found more articles on fathers than on mothers, with fathers represented as either “heroes or monsters” (Lloyd, 1996, cited in Bradshaw et al., 1999). As the dominant constructs of fathers were being debated, there were also attempts to theorise and categorise fathers. According to Pleck, fathering revolved around three main principles: engagement, accessibility, and responsibility (Pleck, 2007, p. 1). A father should be engaged with his children in terms of care and development, he should be accessible, that is, present, and he should be socially, morally, and financially responsible for them. I would argue this theory attempts to merge both traditional and new father constructs.

However, in policy terms, the economic breadwinner view of fatherhood remained dominant. Policies like the 1992 amendments to the European Communities Act 1972 did attempt to encourage men to participate more in the day-to-day management and care of children with recommendations about paternal leave, minimum wage, and laws around a work/life balance (Boswell & Wedge, 2002, p. 17). I would argue that these recommendations were more for the economic benefits they would bring to the labour market than encouraging men to be more caring.

It is also pertinent to note here the development of the concept of ‘family practices’ during the 1990s. Coined by David Morgan (Morgan, 1996), the idea of ‘family practices’ saw a new perspective on the idea of a family. Rather than the traditional couple dyad, i.e. mother and father looking after children, Morgan suggested that families were, in fact, incredibly diverse and that people were “doing family, instead of simply passively residing within a pre-given structure” (Silva & Smart, 1998, p. 5). While a review of the literature around family practices is out of scope of this thesis, it is worth noting how these discussions show the traditional family was no longer recognisable and that “There is a lack of congruence between policies based on how families should be and how they actually operate” (Silva & Smart, 1998, p 2).

Alongside ‘family practices’, Martha Fineman (2013 and 2107) presents the concept of vulnerability as an additional framework for rethinking dominant ideas about care, both within and outside of the

family. An exploration of vulnerability theory is out of scope of this study, but it does offer a way of thinking about care beyond formal rights. This is perhaps particularly pertinent to young fathers in prison and how they could be helped or hindered by the wider strategies for 'governing' fathers seen in the 1990s. As Fineman explains:

A vulnerability approach argues that the State must be responsive to the realities of human vulnerability and its corollary, social dependency, as well as to situations reflecting inherent or necessary inequality, when it initially establishes or sets up mechanisms to monitor these relationships and institutions (Fineman, 2017).

This aside, by 1997 and the election of a New Labour Government under Prime Minister Tony Blair in the UK, the problem of fathers had shifted from being a mere difficulty to a 'crisis'. According to New Labour, fatherhood needed "reconstructing" (Williams, 2008, p. 495). New Labour's political emphasis on rights and responsibilities saw a resurgence of the idea as father as provider, taking economic responsibility for his children. With the father as provider as the "central tenet behind an old-style fathering identity" (Williams, 2008, p. 495) this led some men to become 'confused' by how this aligned with the new father construct (Ibid.). Some suggested this stance was not radically different from the Conservative years, for example, "New Labour family policy under Blair is various shades of Conservative, some of them very deep" (Pascall, 1999, p. 270). However, the Conservative ideology sought to place the governance of families within families themselves, rather than by the State, or by the State at a distance only. The policies introduced by New Labour in the 1990s such as New Deal, Working Family Tax Credit, and improvements to the much-maligned Child Support Agency suggest that the State had a vital role in governing the family (Collier, 2001, p. 527). New Labour's attempts to construct "the democratic family" and the "promotion of equality between women and men" (Ibid., p. 528) brought the question of men's behaviour and activities as fathers to the fore. It also highlighted the differences between the reality and the rhetoric, particularly when it came to childcare (Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999) and New Labour needed to "recognise the labour of

motherhood” (Pascall, 1999, p. 271). The construct might be of a father and mother sharing parenting duties, but the reality was quite different.

While discussions over the distribution of work outside the home and within it continued, there were additional debates about how men, and in particular fathers, were being treated within the law.

According to Collier this was expressed in four ways: 1. Injustice of men and law, promoted by fathers’ rights groups; 2. Child support; 3. Rights of unmarried fathers; 4. Legal status of men in relation to advancements in reproductive technologies (Collier, 2001, p. 522). Non-resident fathers in particular were seen to suffer a series of “personal, relational, cultural, and institutional barriers” that hindered their “presence in the lives of children with whom they do not live” (Doherty, Kouneski & Erickson, 1998, p. 282). Equally, harsh child support policies had turned non-resident dads into “money objects” and these men were seen to be “under fire” (Garfinkel et al., 1999, p. 3). Ideas were formulating that the State should do more to support non-resident dads, not just force them to pay money. Much of this discourse resulted, in the UK at least, in New Labour’s Supporting Families document (Home Office, 1998). This was the first time a Government had published a report on the family. The idea of the consulting paper was to, “help parents do the best for their children” (Ibid., p. 3). The paper claimed that the interests of children were paramount and encouraged marriage as the “surest foundation” (Ibid., p. 4) for raising children, in many ways echoing the Children Act 1989. The report outlined five key areas where the Government could intervene to help parents: access to advice and support; improving prosperity; encouraging better work/life balance; strengthening marriage, and tackling violence, abuse, and teen pregnancy. New Labour went on to introduce further technologies of government to support the consultation document, such as the National Childcare Strategy (Department for Employment and Education, 1998) and Sure Start in 1998. Supporting Families put government and politics at the heart of the family, constructing an ideal to which the population should adhere.

During the 1990s I would argue that fathers veered from being the problem, to the victim, to in crisis, then back to being the problem again. The concept of fatherhood remained complex, undefined, and contradictory. I suggest the father debates in the 1990s reinforced the idea that “the world of programmes is heterogeneous, and rivalrous” (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 190) and that new programmes emerged from a reframing of the political rationalities as the emphasis had shifted from fathers to parenting.

2.8 THE NEW MILLENNIUM

In 2007 US commentator Pleck wrote, “the fathering involvement’ wars of the 1990s are over, and all sides won” (Pleck, 2007, p. 1), yet discussions around fathers continued in the new millennium. The problematisation of non-resident fathers and the construct of the ‘bad’ dad during the 1980s and 1990s had led to Government policies that placed economic provision as a cornerstone of ‘good’ fathering. It could be argued that this did little to encourage men to actively care for their children. The emergent construct of the new dad, a hands-on father who is both a provider and a nurturer, did not necessarily transpire. At the turn of the millennium there was “continuing confusion over the part men actually play in today’s families, and a lack of consensus about their potential role in child-rearing” (Lewis, 2000, p. 2). Fatherhood was still seen as a “nebulous concept” and “it is not always obvious what this new and ‘involved’ fathering entails” (Dermott, 2003). If there had been any consensus on fathers at this juncture it was that their role remained undefined (Coley, 2001, p. 744). Indeed, debate had led to, “competing and potentially conflicting messages about men and fathers” (Gregory & Millner, 2011, p. 3).

Since 2000, within social policy fathers’ involvement has remained predominately around financial support (Lewis, 2000, p. 6; Yates, 2012, p. 207). As discussed in [2.6 Problem dads](#) both the Children Act 1989 and the Child Support Act 1991 have been amended since 2000. The Children Act 2004 focused on child protection and the safeguarding of children, particularly those in the care of their

Local Authority, mainly in response to the Victoria Climbié inquiry (Department of Health, 2003), and established the post of a Children's Commissioner. For fathers it allowed men who were registered on a child's birth certificate to gain automatic parental responsibility, potentially giving parental responsibility to an increased number of fathers (Herring, 2019, p. 398). The Child Support Act 1991 had more startling amendments. The Act, and the Child Support Agency, were, "widely regarded as a failure" (Herring, 2019, p. 211) and its "administrative failings are the subject of further reform" (Lewis, 2000, p. 3). Both the Act and the Agency were replaced by the Child Maintenance and Other Payments Act 2008. This Act created the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission, which was abolished in 2012 to be replaced by the Child Maintenance Group and the Child Maintenance Service. While a critique of the child maintenance reforms is beyond the scope of this research, two things are clear: in policy terms parenting, and for this we read fathering, is primarily about financial support, and the "current law is in a mess" (Herring, 2019, p. 211).

The narrative that men, and fathers, have become the 'victims' of social and legislative change continued post millennium (Henwood & Proctor, 2003, p. 338). The emphasis in policy that men's involvement in the family is purely financial means that, "men are less secure in their identity as fathers than women are in their role as mothers" (Shaw & Lohan, 2012, p. 6). Changing the "structural bias" over parental leave has been suggested as one way to rectify this insecurity (Ibid.). There has also been an increase in research about fathers and pregnancy, with suggestions that men feel "marginalised" during pregnancy (Dolan & Coe, 2011, p. 1027) and should be encouraged to take a more active role. Further discussions about the emotional effect of becoming a father on men suggests men find working and caring for children just as stressful as women (Lewis, 2000, p. 4) and that men are profoundly affected by becoming fathers, but that this affect has been largely unacknowledged (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001, p. 392). This narrative that fathers are hard done by means the fathers' rights movement has remained vocal in the 21st century. Organisations such as Fathers 4 Justice, which was founded in 2001, claim that fathers have become victims and that family law has swung too far in favour of mothers (Collier, 2005, p. 1). Campaigns by fathers' rights groups

for both automatic parental responsibility for all fathers and an automatic right to contact with their children after separation have failed. Amendments to the Children Act 2004 did not go so far as to grant automatic parental responsibility to all fathers, and the Family Justice Review 2011-2012 (Ministry of Justice, 2011), refused to give fathers the automatic right to contact after separation. Yet, as Collier (2014) attests, an “increasingly militant fatherhood lobby” has influenced the direction of policy within the UK since the turn of the millennium (Collier, 2014, p. 59). While the idea of father as victim in law has been refuted (Trinder, 2012) it has found a “receptive audience” among policy makers (Collier, 2014, p. 60), in particular courts have become increasingly open to talk about the emotional father, arguably an effect of the power of father’s rights discourse since the early 2000s.

Collier states the father’s rights movement has misread the “gendered nature of regulation” (Ibid.) as it is mainly resident mothers who do the bulk of childcare and who are “judged.... In the acting out of this duty of care in a way that most men arguably do not” (Collier, 2005, p. 70). Also, Collier claims, fathers have misread the law’s drift towards ‘affirming’ father involvement rather than disavowing it (Collier, 2014, p. 61). Equally, fathers’ rights groups have tended to use “regressive and questionable” gendered images as part of their argument (Ibid.), presenting mothers as ‘bad’ and hampering men’s desires to be responsible fathers by withholding contact (Collier, 2005, p. 4).

The post-separation contact debate is also framed within the sensitive arena of domestic abuse.

While some say that men should not automatically have legal presumption of contact because of the fear of domestic violence, fathers’ rights groups claim the absence of a father in the life of a child is more damaging than the threat of violence. Reece (2006) argued that women’s groups who focus on domestic violence as a way of denying contact to fathers in contact disputes bifurcated women into two sets: the domestic violence victim, and unreasonable mothers (Reece, 2006). In reality, refusing contact to a father can be a lot more complex (Ibid.). Once again there is a sharp divide between the rhetoric and the reality.

While the narratives around fathers have shifted from fathers as problems to fathers as victims, they can still be problematised, when it suits. After the riots in major UK cities in August 2011, then Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron blamed the violence on “absent dads” (Yates, 2012, p. 204), a term that had not been heard in UK Government communiqués since the early 1990s. I would suggest this political rationality led to the controversial Troubled Families Programme in 2012, which launched a host of projects and government technologies (see Bate & Bellis, 2017; Loft, 2020). Initial reports suggested it has not been a success (Day, Bryson & White, 2016) although the programme is still in place, and the Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto from December 2019 stated that they, “would improve the Troubled Families Programme” (Conservative Party, 2019), although what this improvement entails has yet to be set out.

Note that the current political environment, that has seen a shift from neoliberal to populist ideologies, characterised by the 2016 Brexit vote, Donald Trump’s presidency, Boris Johnson’s tenure as UK Prime Minister, and the political response to the Covid-19 pandemic, renders the use of Rose & Miller’s governmentality model moot (Gugushvili et al., 2020; Flinders, 2020; Jansen, van Klink, & van der Geest, 2020). While the concepts of neoliberalism and populism are contested and disputed, and the use of them here is somewhat crude, the contemporary political climate where populism appears to promote a distrust of expertise (Edis, 2020) suggests that current discourse around fathers may not lead to the technologies of government we have seen in previous decades. In other words, with a Government that appears to rely more on subjects ‘self-governing’, any resulting government policies around fathers may not necessarily follow Rose & Miller’s analytical framework.

While the absent ‘bad’ dad narrative has not been as dominant in the past two decades as it was in the 1980s and 1990s, the constructs of father as breadwinner and father as nurturer remain perplexing. Research has shown there is little common consensus among fathers about what fatherhood entails (Williams, 2008, p. 488). For example, The British Social Attitudes Survey 2019 showed that 40% of people still believe the woman in a working couple should take most of the paid

leave with a new-born baby (Curtice et al, 2019, p. 83). However, the response to the idea of the man being the sole breadwinner has decreased from around 69% in 2012, to 51% in 2019 (Ibid., p. 89). Yet other research has found that the breadwinner role is still dominant. In their research on fathers Hatter, Vinter & Williams (2002) found “the breadwinner role still defines the way in which many men think about fatherhood” (Hatter, Vinter & Williams, 2002, p. 6). It is clear that contemporary fathers are now presented with a wide variety of different types or models of fatherhood (Hatter, Vinter & Williams, 2002; Williams, 2008, p. 488).

What has changed in a hundred years? Men are no longer the absolute rulers of the family in legal terms. Absent dads are forced to pay for their children. Women are no longer expected to stay at home to look after children. The modern father is expected to do his equal share of caring. But one thing remains clear. In policy terms at least, the main feature of fatherhood is still economic (Busby & Weldon-Johns, 2019). Rhetoric around fatherhood has changed throughout the decades, but has the reality of fatherhood changed? Despite everything that’s been talked about over the past 50 years, the breadwinner role is still the most persuasive. UK policies remain fixed on the idea that economic input equals responsible fathering. Fatherhood is still a financial issue. This thinking is ingrained in culture and a “major obstacle” to changing the way fathers are viewed and supported (Lewis, 2000). And there is still the question over whether paternal economic policies are what’s best for children, or simply an attempt to reduce social security costs (Coley, 2001). Does paying money every month for your children make you a ‘good’ father? Or does it help the State reduce costs? If you care for and nurture your children but cannot afford to pay for them, does this make you a ‘bad’ father?

One aspect of fathering that has been alluded to but perhaps not interrogated in any real detail, is whether the quality of a relationship between a man and his children is more important than the relationship itself. Some research has found the quality of involvement with a child is more important than the quantity, i.e., a non-resident father could be more involved with children than a resident father (Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999; Dennison & Smallbone, 2015), yet this concept has not been

examined in detail. Equally, a parent can be physically available but psychologically absent (Boswell & Wedge, 2002). This brings us neatly to the question of fathers in prison. Could they still fulfil a strong parental role as long as their contact with their children was of good quality, even if they didn't see them regularly? As has already been discussed, research into fathers in prison, particularly young fathers in prison, is limited. However, for the next section I give an overview of extant research into this subject and attempt to show how the general discussions on fathers and fatherhood have or have not influenced it.

2.9 FATHERS IN PRISON: THE LITERATURE

The previous sections have shown there has been a wealth of research into fathers and fatherhood, particularly since the 1980s. Yet the literature on fathers in prison is sparse, and the literature on young fathers in prison even more rare. As Clarke et al., (2005) noted, "Fathers who live apart from their children have been investigated mainly through the lens of separation, divorce and repartnering" (p. 221), yet "little is known about father involvement among prisoner fathers" (Boswell & Wedge, 2002, cited in Clarke et al., 2005). This is not just a UK phenomenon, as research from the USA suggested, "Despite political rhetoric bemoaning "fatherless America," family disruption connected to the incarceration of fathers has received minimal empirical exploration" (Arditti, Smock & Parkman, 2005, p. 268). It would be remiss to claim there has been no research into fathers in prison, as the rest of this section will show, there have been pockets of research into imprisoned fathers and their families, particularly since the late 1990s. This is in comparison to the literature around mothers in prison. While a review of this literature is out of scope of this research, it is pertinent to note that the subject of mothers in prison has been of interest for several decades. As Burgess & Flynn (2013) note, "since the 1960s, studies have shown that maternal incarceration is linked to poor outcomes for children and their mothers" (2013, p. 74). I would argue that this interest in mothers in prison aligns with the general focus on mothers and their roles in the lives of their children as discussed in [2.4 Post-War](#) and [2.5 The 1960s to the 1980s](#), in that, during this period,

mothers were seen as essential to positive child outcomes. Fathers were not subject to this kind of focus until the 1980s. However, according to some researchers, interest in mothers increased during the 1990s (Caddle & Crisp, 1997) at the same time as the interest in fathers in prison grew. I would suggest this aligns with the emphasis on child welfare during the 1990s, as highlighted by the Children Act 1989.

I would argue that the literature around mothers in prison tends to be more sympathetic to their situations. Much of the research concerns the often chaotic and disrupted lives of female prisoners and suggests that “Incarcerated mothers and their children are an extremely vulnerable and marginalized social group” (Burgess & Flynn, 2013, p. 74). I would argue this is the same for some young fathers in prison and the analysis chapters provide some confirmation of this. There is also evidence from US research into the parenting stresses suffered by imprisoned mothers and fathers that “Fathers reported more parenting stress concerning their children than incarcerated mothers” (Loper et al., 2009, p. 498). This was due to fathers having less contact with their children, poor relationships with their child’s primary carers and “higher levels of parenting stress concerning their attachment to children and competence as a parent” (Ibid., p 496). While it is not a competition between fathers and mothers, it is relevant to note that the narrative differs, depending on the gender of the parent. In addition, research into fathers in prison tends to focus on the affect having a father in prison has on his child or children and wider family, rather than the lived experiences of the men themselves (Boswell & Wedge, 2002, pp. 21-24). In a sense extant research looks at those *surrounding* the imprisoned father, rather than the father himself, who, while at the centre of the relationships examined, becomes an abstract figure around whom the rest of the family orbits. Reasons for this absence of a sympathetic viewpoint regarding fathers could be, as Boswell & Wedge (2002) suggested that, “prisoners are an unpopular group in society” (Boswell & Wedge 2002, p. 21). Yet that does not explain the contrast in the research on mothers in prison. Perhaps it is just fathers who are unpopular?

As described in [2.1 The introduction](#), the intent of this literature review was to understand the concept of fatherhood by examining the literature around it, then to examine how this related to fathers in prison. It was startling to note how seldom fathers in prison, and young fathers in prison, were mentioned within the wider fatherhood discussions. While examining why this might be, I came across a curious challenge – that of finding the official number of young men in prison who are fathers, or fathers to be, whether in the secure estate, young offender institutes or adult prisons. As attempting to find this number formed part of my literature review, I have decided to comment on this challenge here as it emphasises how little is known about this cohort. Official statistics, such as *The Offender Management Statistics Quarterly Bulletin* and the *UK Prison Population Statistics* (Ministry of Justice & Her Majesty’s Prison Service, 2021) provide an extraordinary level of detail about the UK prisoner population. From these two sources alone, you can discover the age, sex, nationality, religion, and ethnicity of a prisoner. You can find the length of sentence being served, the nature of the crime committed and whether a prisoner was a former member of the Armed Services. You can discover the number of prisoners who have been in care, claimed benefits, achieved a degree, were homeless or were married or living with a partner before prison. All this data is collected about prisoners, yet there is still no agreed reporting on the parenting situation of prisoners, as other research has also highlighted (Magaletta & Herbst, 2001, p. 89; Sherlock, 2004; Meek, 2011; Smith, 2015). This is true of mothers too with information about them, “not routinely collected” (Caddle & Crisp 1997; see also Meek, 2011, p. 941). One of the earliest pieces of research I found about fathers in prison came from sociologist Pauline Morris, who, after conducting a comprehensive study of prisoners and their families stated, “No reliable statistics are available concerning the number of children whose fathers are in jail at any one time” (Morris, 1967, p. 424). While Morris’ comments refer to the number of children with fathers in prison, rather than the number of fathers in prison with children, highlighting how it is normally those surrounding the father who are examined, it appears that little has changed regarding statistics over 50 years later. To my current knowledge, no country officially records the parenting position of any prisoner, male or female. According to Raikes

(2009) a record of prisoners' children was proposed as part of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) database, however, "this commitment has yet to be realised" (Raikes, 2009, p. 4). Thus, the number of mothers and fathers in prison becomes an estimate, with, as expected, varying results. In the UK it's estimated over 160,000 children have a parent in prison (Ministry of Justice & Department for Children, Schools & Families, 2007) and although this figure covers both mothers and fathers, with the prison population of the UK largely male (Ministry of Justice, Her Majesty's Prison Service & Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, 2020), we can surmise that the majority of these children have a father in prison. Katz, (2002), suggests around half of the general male prison population in the UK is a father. Over half (54%) of prisoners from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) research said they were fathers (Williams, Papadopoulou & Booth, 2012, p. 16). This is in comparison to an estimated 66% of women in prison who are mothers (Hamlyn & Lewis, 2000, p. x). The number of juveniles or young adults in prison who are fathers is even less clear. Estimates start at one in four young offenders being a father (Buston, 2010), to 28% (Unruh, Bullis & Yovanoff, 2004), to 40% of inmates in a Rochester young offender institute who identified themselves as fathers (Earle, 2012).

The situation appears to be the same outside the UK. In Scandinavian prisons there are no official records for the number of prisoners with children. Estimates from Norway show that around 50% of prisoners (men and women) have children (Smith, 2015). The same percentage is estimated in Denmark, while in Sweden it's estimated that between 8,000 and 30,000 children have a parent in prison (Ibid.). In 2007 one in every 43 children in the USA had a parent in prison. This figure rises to one in four within the African American community (Dennison et al., 2014). An estimated 54 to 84% of US male inmates are fathers (Magaletta & Herbst, 2001) or 60% according to Arditti, Smock & Parkman, (2005). In Australia it's estimated that 37% of non-Indigenous men and 53% of Indigenous men in prison have dependent children (Dennison & Smallbone, 2015).

Unable to find an official number of fathers in prison from the literature, I contacted the Ministry of Justice directly. My request was referred to the Freedom of Information team and I was informed that, “The department holds information that you have asked for, but it is exempt from disclosure because it is intended for future publication” (Personal communications, 2016). This, intriguingly, seemed to confirm that official numbers *did* exist, but were to be released at a later date. The correspondence continued:

...we have considered whether it would be in the public interest for us to provide you with the information ahead of publication, despite the exemption being applicable. In this case, I have concluded that the public interest favours withholding this information (Ibid.).

I was then referred to a website link to Government publications, where the data was to be published in “late 2016/2017” (Ibid.) and to a survey from 2012 where the number of children with incarcerated parents was estimated (Williams, Papadopoulou & Booth, 2012). At the time of writing the website link went to a generic search page on the UK Government website, suggesting that this data has not yet been published. It seems that official statistics for the number of fathers in prison are still not available. Of course, even if there were ‘official’ statistics they may not be entirely accurate. For example, men may not wish the authorities to know they are fathers, or they may not even know themselves. However, the fact there are no statistics at all suggests, “we haven’t found it important enough to ask [prisoners] about their children” (Gabel & Johnston, 1995, p. vii). This lack of official statistics raises a pertinent point about why fathers and young fathers in particular in prison have been ignored. Rose & Miller claim that for reality to be rendered into a “calculable form” it requires a plethora of “written reports, drawings, pictures, numbers, charts, graphs and statistics” (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 185). These “figures transform the domain to which government is applied” (Ibid., p. 186), ergo, if there are no figures, there is no domain to which government can be applied. The unknown and unknowable cannot be governed. There has been no call to problematise fathers in prison, thus no political rationalities leading to programmes that would make reality knowable and

allow it to be analysed and rectified through technologies of government (Ibid., p. 178). I would suggest this lack of official statistics is one of the reasons why young fathers in prison are so poorly served by policy.

The absence of statistics aside, there was an increase in research into fathers in prison from the mid-1990s onwards. I would argue that this was partly due to the growing interest in the effect absent or non-resident fathers had on their child's development. Prior to this, fathers in prison had largely been left out of the debates around 'deadbeat dads' paying for their children that so epitomised the narrative of the 1980s. Even the Child Support Act 1991 left prison fathers out. You do not have to pay child support from prison (Child Maintenance and Other Payments Act 2008, Section 29). While fathers who did not live with their children because of divorce or separation were seen as a problem, fathers in prison, who remember are also non-resident fathers, were not. It was a renewed focus on child welfare that perhaps led to more research into fathers in prison and a perceived increase in research into mothers in prison at the same time (Caddle & Crisp, 1997). Previously, research claimed that children were too young to be affected by a father's imprisonment although they could be affected by the criminal act undertaken by the father (Morris, 1967). In other words they could be affected by what their father had done, but not by his absence. Morris also suggested that mothers saw poor behaviour in their children to be 'annoying' rather than a side effect of a father in prison (Ibid.). In fact, Morris suggested that problems faced by children whose fathers were in prison, were largely down to the conduct of the mother, as she states:

In prison the man is relieved of his family responsibilities, and the wife usually finds difficulty in providing a psychologically stable home for the children, resulting in their becoming increasingly disturbed. (Morris, 1967, p. 430).

But gradually it was thought that imprisoning fathers essentially made their children victims of their crimes as well and that these children "tended to be socially, financially and educationally deprived" (Shaw, 1987 and 1992, cited in Boswell & Wedge, 2002, p. 22). Arditti, Smock & Parkman called the

children of prisoners a “fragile population” (Arditti, Smock & Parkman, 2005, p. 269). Further research suggests they face a significant set of challenges, from mental health problems, to trauma, to bullying to poor social status and economic challenges (Steinhoff & Berman, 2012; Smith, 2015). As “Prisoners are drawn from the most socially deprived sections of society” (Houchin, 2005, cited in Smith et al., 2007, p. 1), imprisonment of a parent adds further deprivation to an already challenging situation. Equally, those who have had a parent in prison are five times more likely to follow a criminal path and be negatively involved in the criminal justice system themselves (Mazza, 2000; Bushfield, 2004; Miller, 2006). I would argue this research highlights the difficulties the children of prisoners may face, but there is little about the experience of the imprisoned father within this narrative.

In this vein, questions have been raised about whether a prisoner is a parent should be a factor in sentencing. Boswell & Wedge, (2002), point out that if elements of the Children Act 1989 and the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that states children have the right to see their parents, were invoked in court sentencing, then many men would not be good candidates for imprisonment, as this could affect their children’s rights. Some countries have overcome this by creating legislation, such as in Norway, where the rights of the child to see their parents while in prison have been written into prison law (safety, standards and suitable facilities are prerequisite) (Smith, 2015). A full examination of the literature about the children of prisoners is out of scope of this review, however, I would argue that the fact having contact with both parents was considered beneficial to a child’s welfare and was a mainstay of the Children Act 1989 potentially increased research into how much contact fathers in prison had with their children. To reiterate though, and reflecting the paramountcy principle, increasing contact was not seen as beneficial to the father, but to the child.

Children’s welfare is also at the forefront of research into mothers in prison. For example, in 2019 a report from the Joint Committee of Human Rights found that “sending a mother to prison had a serious, detrimental impact on her children” (Joint Committee of Human Rights, 2019, p. 5) but also that “a child with an imprisoned mother is likely to suffer more negative effects than a child with an

imprisoned father” (Minson, 2019, cited in Joint Committee of Human Rights, 2019, p. 7), clearly placing an absent mother as more problematic than an absent father. This narrative has led to calls to review whether mothers should be imprisoned at all (see Earle, 2018). Equally, separating mothers and their children has been seen as problematic and a breach of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, “Imprisonment of a parent involves the forcible separation of parent and child – it interferes with the Article 8 Rights of the Child by depriving the child of parental care” (Epstein, 2012, p. 3). This narrative has led to policies specifically for mothers in prison such as the Female Offender Strategy (Ministry of Justice, 2018). While the strategy has its detractors (see Booth, Masson & Baldwin, 2018) it could be a useful learning point for young fathers in prison. The strategy recommends early intervention, an increase in community services and improvements to the female prison estate (Ministry of Justice, 2018). There is, as far as I am aware, no policy like this specifically for young fathers.

The fact there have been some policies for mothers in prison when, as aforementioned there are few official statistics about them, elicits some contradiction when viewed through Rose & Miller’s *Problematics of Government* framework (1992). According to Rose & Miller, governance requires statistics in order to make the unknowable knowable, and therefore governable. This fits neatly when talking about fathers in prison. But where does this leave us with mothers? If there are no official statistics about them why have there been technologies of government (policies) developed in order to govern them? I do not have a concrete answer to this, other than that, while Rose & Miller see technologies of government as a way to solve problems, mothers in prison have not been problematised, i.e., they are not problems that need to be solved, but they have been ‘sympathised’. This sympathetic view of mothers also reinforces assumptions about how important mothers are to child welfare. The lack of sympathy towards fathers in prison suggests that they are not seen as important to child welfare. What I mean by this is that mothers in prison are seen widely as vulnerable victims who merit help and support. Therefore, policies have been developed for them. Young fathers in prison have not.

To return to the subject of contact with children, contact is, of course, restricted in prison, as being removed from family and friends is part of the punishment. In their study of 51 incarcerated fathers in the US, Arditti, Smock & Parkman (2005) found making and maintaining contact with their children was extremely challenging for prisoners and a lack of contact was, “seen as an important reason for fathers’ failure to stay involved” with their children (Ibid., p. 278). An imprisoned father has no control over contact with his children and is at the mercy of both the prison’s rules, and at the discretion of the primary carer of the child, usually the mother, leaving them feeling “powerless” (Ibid., p. 267). Physical visits are where prisons are seen to exert the most control (Nurse, 2002), and tend to be structured and scheduled and liable to cancellations at the last minute. Equally, the average prisoner in the UK is imprisoned 53 miles from their home, making it difficult for visitors who could face transportation challenges and excessive costs (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). Prisoners are also restricted to a limited number of visits. According to the Prison Rules 1999, a convicted prisoner is able “to receive a visit twice in every period of four weeks” and while prison establishments vary and prisoners can earn more visits, this number remains low. Logistics aside, imprisoned fathers are reliant on maintaining good relationships with the primary carer of the child, whether that’s the mother, grandparent, or other. As Lanier (1993) states, “if a family member, such as an ex-spouse or a grandparent, is unwilling or unable to bring the child to visit the imprisoned parent, the parent-child interaction is thwarted” (Lanier, 1993, p. 52). The mother or primary caregiver of the child generally holds the power over visits and contact (Magaletta & Herbst, 2001, pp. 90-91; Clarke et al., 2005, p. 222). With a limited number of visits men with children with more than one woman are reliant on, not just their direct relationship with the mother, but with the relationships between mothers. Therefore, a father’s relationship with their children is inextricably linked with his relationship to the mother(s) (Nurse, 2002). Fathers who maintain a strong parental relationship with their children while in prison cited a “united front” with the child’s primary caregiver, in Dennison & Smallbone, (2015, p. 74), highlighting how important the relationship between mother and father is.

The importance of relationships runs through the extant fathers in prison research. Maintaining good relationships has been highlighted as a key element in the successful rehabilitation of prisoners and minimising the “pains of imprisonment” (Sykes, 1958). Lord Woolf’s report into the riots and siege in HMP Strangeways in Manchester in 1990, and subsequent disturbances in prisons across the country, called for better provision of resources to help prisoners retain family links, stating, “Prisoners’ links with their families are of vital importance to them and to minimise the harmful effects of imprisonment” (Woolf & Tumim, 1991, p. 32). The report also acknowledged prisoners, both male and female, should be allowed to nurture relationships with their children: “Schemes allowing children to visit for much longer than normal visiting hours should also be encouraged, and not only for female prisoners” (ibid.). Nearly three decades later, the Farmer review, commissioned by the UK Government as part of a wide-ranging series of prison reforms, echoed Woolf’s claims. Lord Farmer upheld Lord Woolf’s findings that family relationships and other relational ties are a key indicator of success in improving the lives of prisoners both during and after imprisonment, stating:

If prisons are truly to be places of reform we cannot ignore the reality that a supportive relationship with at least one person is indispensable for a prisoner’s ability to get through their sentence well and achieve rehabilitation (Farmer, 2017, p. 6).

It should be noted that the literature into prisoners and relationships tends to involve relationships in general, rather than focusing on prisoners’ experiences of fatherhood. Equally, research has also largely been undertaken across the wider prison estate with men of all ages, rather than on young men who are fathers. In addition, literature on young fathers and their relationships tends not to include young men in prison. It can be argued that there is a deficit of research into young fathers in prison and their relationships, which to some degree this study attempts to address. However, it would also be reasonable to suggest here that there is scope for further research into the importance of relationships with this cohort.

Research has already recognised that a father's contact with his children tends to significantly reduce when that father is in prison (Swanson et al., 2013, p. 454). Prior research into adolescent and young fathers – though it must be noted not ones in prison – has shown that their relationship with their children often depends on other people, particularly the mother of the child and the maternal grandparent (Speake, Cameron & Gilroy, 1997). Swanson et al., (2013, p. 463) found that negative attitudes of family members to a father in prison formed a significant barrier to them developing a relationship with their children, while Kalil, Ziol-Guest & Coley (2005, p. 206) found there was an importance based on “parental and extended family roles” in predicting which adolescent fathers became active parents. In other words, for young fathers, their contact and association with their children is controlled by their relationships with other people. The literature clearly indicates not just the importance of relationships per se in supporting prisoners during and after their sentences and in young men's fathering activities, but also the *quality* of those relationships. If we accept that non-resident young fathers (though not necessarily in prison) are largely dependent on others for contact with their children, and that relationships with these ‘others’ has to be positive and of good quality, what does this mean for young fathers who have to negotiate the additional challenges of being in prison?

Where physical visits do occur the structure of a prison visit brings its own challenges. Visiting facilities depend on the prison and visiting hours can be long and pressurised. Some prisons and institutions have very poor facilities for visitors with few opportunities for game playing and relaxed interactions. The prison system, “does not prioritise or adequately facilitate parenting” (Dennison & Smallbone, 2015, p. 62) and “The prison system enters children's developmental systems and regulates and controls the type and timing of contact that fathers have with their children” (Ibid., p. 63). The atmosphere of the prison can overwhelm the visit, with children getting bored and parents running out of things to say (Clarke, et al, 2005, p. 234). Some parents don't want their children to see or be seen by other inmates, such as sex offenders. Visiting can be a strain on children who are often expected to sit still for several hours (Genisio, 1996). For some prisoners seeing their children is just

too difficult emotionally. As well as feeling ashamed about their situation, they may feel they don't want their children to have to face the reality of a harsh prison environment. Some children are not told their fathers are in prison in an attempt to shield them from the shame and stigma (Clarke et al, 2005, p. 230). Some men follow the course of 'hard timing', where they cut themselves off from the outside world in an attempt to cope with their imprisonment (Nurse, 2002). They can feel guilty and powerless and not want to see their children as visits evoke painful emotions. Ultimately, the structure of the prison does not cater for fathers (Ibid.). Visiting facilities in prisons were highlighted as being poor as long ago as the 1960s, when sociologist Pauline Morris suggested that facilities within prison should be more child friendly, with baby changing arrangements and refreshments available (Morris, 1967). More contemporary research in Sweden found that prisons with better visiting facilities were further away from the child's place of residence, meaning that any benefit obtained from having a more pleasant visiting environment, was counteracted by the cost and inconvenience of travelling a long way for a visit (Steinhoff & Berman, 2012). It is hardly surprising that often visiting becomes too much for all involved and stops altogether. For example, it was found that contact with fathers in prison ceased for a third of inmates once in prison – these inmates had described themselves as previously being involved fathers with their children (Dennison & Smallbone, 2015, p. 61). While much of the research around contact and visits focuses on how fathers lose contact with their children through logistics and practicalities, a small pocket of research has shown that imprisoned fathers who already have a poor relationship with their children are more likely to suffer poor psychological experiences (Lanier, 1993) and fathers who are deprived of parental involvement can become depressed and suffer what is known as "involuntary child absence syndrome" (Ibid., citing Jacobs, 1986). While it could be argued that research into contact and visits is a programme of government that seeks to make the unknown knowable and therefore governable, what is starkly missing is any of the technologies of government that allow the "calculated administration of life" (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 189).

Another branch of research is that of prisons and masculinity (see Messerschmidt, 2001). While a full review of the literature in this area is out of scope of this research, I note this because the perceived hyper-masculine environment of a male prison seems removed from the construct of fathers as carers and nurturers that emerged from the 1970s onwards. Not that a caring father is necessarily unmasculine, more that the prison environment is seen as an overtly masculine and unemotional environment, where displaying masculinity becomes a necessary survival skill. With no job, car, or money to stake your claim as a 'real man' inside, some men try to assert their masculinity in other ways, including talking about their sexual prowess and denigrating women (Nurse, 2002), not the ideals synonymous with the new construct of fathers (Collier & Sheldon, 2008; Shade et al, 2013, p. 436). In contrast, Magaletta & Herbst (2001) found that for some men, parenting was the only subject they could use to discuss their emotions while in prison. In a hyper-masculine environment, talking about your children was the only time you could be seen to be less aggressive.

During the 1990s, teen or young adult fathers were starting to be examined, although this research did not cover young fathers in prison. By the late 1990s New Labour's Social Exclusion Unit and their Teen Pregnancy Strategy highlighted how the UK Government was homing in on younger, unmarried parents, although the technologies of government introduced by the Exclusion Unit and Strategy were largely aimed at the teenage mother. At the same time young fathers in prison were starting to generate their own sets of research projects (Unruh, Bullis & Yovanoff, 2004; Buston 2010; Buston et al., 2012). One of the most extensive pieces of research about teen and young adult fathers in prison came from the USA (Nurse, 2002). Nurse, a professor in sociology and anthropology, undertook a significant research project within the Californian Youth Authority, using surveys and interviews, observing parenting classes within youth facilities and prison visits between young men and their families. As elsewhere, few states in the USA keep accurate records of the exact number of men in prison with children, but the California Youth Authority estimates around 25% of inmates are fathers (Ibid.). Nurse's research states that these young fathers tended to be unmarried and from poor, minority and disadvantaged backgrounds, and they were twice as likely to indulge in risky and criminal

behaviour as non-fathers. Nurse's research also highlighted race concerns, with black males between the ages of 15 and 18 being twice as likely to become young fathers as their white or Hispanic counterparts. One of the standout findings of Nurse's research was the lack of policy for young fathers in prison in the USA. She noted that while there were policies for young fathers and policies for young offenders there were no policies for both, leading to a conflict of responsibility. Young fathers are expected to take responsibility and be there for their children, while young offenders are urged to take responsibility for their actions by going to prison, where 'being there' for their children is challenging (Nurse, 2002). This appears remiss at best, as studies have shown that there are clear links between the two behaviours (Ibid.; Unruh, Bullis & Yovanoff, 2004, p. 406). Another key piece of research in this area looked at the risk variables of young, imprisoned fathers and found that young offenders tend to have negative life outcomes, which in turn affects their children and the teenage mother (Unruh, Bullis & Yovanoff, 2004). This research, again from the USA, found that young fathers in prison are more likely to have had a parent with alcoholism, a parent who is a convicted felon, or have been brought up by a non-biological parent. They are likely to have a low socio-economic situation, and to live with a mother with a poor educational background. On an individual level, gang membership and alcoholism are likely to be predictive of teenage fatherhood and offending behaviour. Unruh, Bullis & Yovanoff name these young men as "multi-problem individuals" (Ibid., p. 417). Many of these young fathers find themselves in a spiral of crime, and prison becomes a "normal part of life" (Nurse, 2002). Further research into teen fathers found that they tend to have lower socio-economic backgrounds, low educational attainment, and fewer job opportunities than childless peers and are more likely to be involved in crime (Bunting & McCauley, 2004, p. 295).

While these earlier studies into young fathers in prison began to shine a spotlight on this cohort, I would suggest that they do not provide any detail about how these young men experienced fatherhood. The research appears to be more about their background and familial situation and rather limits them as 'problem individuals' but does not really involve these men in the wider fatherhood debate (see Resnick, Chambliss & Blum, 1993, cited in Williams, 1997, p. 55). While these

young men have been described as problem individuals, I would argue that they have not been problematised. This is in comparison to the aforementioned more sympathetic view of mothers in prison who are seen as an “extremely vulnerable and marginalized social group” (Burgess & Flynn, 2013, p. 74) rather than as ‘problem individuals’.

While I argue that fathers in prison have been absent from the debates about fatherhood that have constructed ideologies of the good father, this does not mean that they do not have their own versions of what being a good parent may mean. Much of the literature concerning imprisoned fathers depicts them as having idealistic and optimistic views of parenthood (Nurse, 2002; Bushfield, 2004, p. 114; Buston, 2010, p. 2215). Prison gives people time to think and come up with ideal scenarios for how things will be when they are released, how their relationships with their children will evolve. For many, these ideals are far removed from reality. Released fathers have to contend with numerous challenges, including finding employment, housing, rebuilding relationships with the family, with the child’s mother and with the general community, as well as dealing with the social stigma of having been in prison. This is all before attempting to nurture a relationship with a child or children who may not even remember who they are. Prisoners spend a lot of time thinking and imagining how they want their lives to be, which can lead to high expectations and ultimately frustration and disappointment when they are released and find that they do not get the reaction they are expecting. They may have found that others have played the father role while they’ve been inside. Or that their children are afraid of them, or aren’t entirely sure who they are (Nurse, 2002). Many of the young men in Buston’s research had unrealistic plans for release, including how they would conduct their relationship with their children. They had very strong desires to be ‘good fathers’, although when prompted, few could articulate what that actually meant, although many felt that they were not ready to take up the role of financial provider (Buston, 2010, p. 2216). In addition, Bushfield, found that men had a “sense of certainty” that they would be good fathers, with, “no self-doubt” (Bushfield, 2004, p. 114). This suggests that young fathers in prison have ideas about what a good father is, and a desire, or belief that they will and can be good fathers. What is less evident is

what that good father actually is. Some research has suggested that young men may “buy into” the ideals of fatherhood simply because they are not in a position to pursue it while they are in prison (Earle, 2012). And studies have shown young men have different ideas on what paternal involvement means to the mothers of their children (Bunting & McCauley, 2004, p. 302).

Dennison & Smallbone (2015, pp. 76-77) found that 75% of the fathers in prison they questioned felt they were role models to their children before they were imprisoned, but what this meant differed from man to man. For some it was working hard, for others it was providing for their children, for others it was teaching positive life skills, such as honesty, integrity, and respect. The percentage dropped to 56% when those fathers were asked whether they would consider themselves role models while in prison, suggesting that prison affects a man’s perception of himself as a father. Also, the idea of what a role model is changed for those men inside and became more about guiding children and helping them to make good decisions, with one man explaining that he could tell his children, “about jail, so they don’t ever wanna come here” (Ibid.). In much of the literature parenting is the one topic where men show a willingness to change their criminal behaviour as being a parent changes circumstances and responsibilities (Magaletta & Herbst, 2001; Monsbakken, Lyngstad & Skardhamar, 2013). For some men imprisonment and release can be seen as a chance to start again (Dennison & Smallbone, 2015; Arditti, Smock & Parkman, 2005). In Shade et al., (2013, p. 441) fatherhood was seen as transformative, with many young men believing fatherhood would change them, although they did not know how this change would manifest itself.

One area of research that has focused on prisoners as fathers is that showing how parenting classes and further education can be a positive experience, even if the prisoners were forced to attend.

Education can be linked to employment post release, which has a positive effect on life chances and can benefit children (Nurse, 2002; Jarvis et al., 2004). Parenting classes and education are advocated to keep strong links between father and child alive, for the father as well as for the child’s mental wellbeing (Lanier, 1993). Projects such as Breaking Barriers with Books in the USA (Genisio, 1996)

showed how reading and books were used to help fathers in prison to develop a relationship with their child and to be more active in their intellectual development. Projects such as this exist today, like Storybook Dads in the UK. Prison parenting study groups have proved useful, though there are currently few longitudinal studies into education showing what, if any, long term affects there are on families (Smith, 2015). Buston et al., (2012), reviewed a number of parental interventions for young fathers starting in 1991. They found the courses were largely enjoyed and received positive responses from those taking part, however, mothers of children who were questioned said they found no real difference in attitude or behaviour after their partners took the courses (Ibid.). The literature on this aspect of prison life is important to note as, longitudinal results aside, it does show that parenting interventions can be successful, but also suggests that for fathers in prison, fathering is something that can be taught, or learnt, not something that necessarily comes naturally.

Despite the increase in research into fathers in prison, and the literature cited in this section:

Still little is known about the experience of incarcerated fatherhood and the deeper implications of imprisonment for fathers during confinement and as they approach re-entry (Arditti, Smock & Parkman, 2005, p. 269).

I would reiterate the point that extant research has not examined fathers in prison from an experiential viewpoint and has merely skirted around practical matters like contact and visits, without truly delving into what this might mean for the fathers themselves and what their needs are. And this is particularly clear when it comes to young fathers. They have been examined as products of problem backgrounds, with multiple challenges ahead, but not as fathers in their own right. And, I would argue, that while they have been described as problem individuals from troubled backgrounds, they have not actually been problematised. It is the absence of this problematisation that is so telling here. As Rose & Miller (1992) state, “government is a problematizing activity: it poses the obligations of rulers in terms of the problems they seek to address” (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 181). Without problematisation there are fewer obligations from ‘rulers’, in other words, if young fathers in prison

are not seen as a problem, there is no perceived need to govern them through policy or other technologies of government. Fathering from prison has been described as a, “unique phenomenon” (Magaletta & Herbst, 2001), but not a problem.

2.10 CONCLUSIONS TO THIS CHAPTER

In the introduction to this chapter, I discussed how I had, naively, sought to find a definition of fatherhood that would allow me to understand if and how fathering from prison may differ from the perceived norm. At the conclusion of this chapter, I would argue that, while there are two dominant constructs of fathers - the traditional breadwinner construct, and the new, caring, nurturant father - these constructs are fluid, complex and confusing. It is clear that these constructs formed the basis for the programmes of government that so minutely examined a certain type of father in the 1990s and beyond (Rose & Miller, 1992). These programmes led to technologies of government that sought to govern perceived problem fathers, most notably in the UK with the Child Support Act 1991.

However, throughout my review into father research young fathers in prison were essentially missing. Even when, in the 1980s and 1990s fathers, and more specifically absent fathers were problematised, dads in prison were barely mentioned, and young dads even less so. The lack of statistics and research into this group of men make it challenging to view the literature through Rose & Miller’s framework, but also make the case that these men have been so othered and absent from the wider debate they have become invisible. Is this because they were not considered to be part of the problem, or were simply not important enough to examine, or perhaps they were just completely forgotten about? The analysis chapters of this thesis will show that the young fathers interviewed as part of this study had unique experiences, their own ideas of fatherhood, and that, for many of them, the fact they were fathers or about to become fathers was extremely important. They should not be invisible.

The idea of a literature review is not to do an “exhaustive” review of all literature around a subject (Bryman, 2016, p. 98) but to look for unanswered questions within the literature (Ibid.) with a view to

developing an argument for the actual research (Ibid., p. 100). I would argue that this literature review has shown that there is a lack of understanding of the needs and experiences of young fathers in prison, that needs to be addressed.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the strategies and methodology used to undertake the research into young fathers in prison. It includes my initial thoughts and rationale for choosing the specific methodological approach; a description of the research itself, and examines the reflective analysis that took place before, during, and after the research period. This chapter also gives an overview of the young fathers, or fathers to be, who agreed to be interviewed as part of the research.

3.2 DEFINING THE YOUNG FATHER

Before describing the research methodology I wanted to explain my reasoning behind my definition of young father. In the UK there is no official definition of a young father and no legislation about when you can or cannot become a parent, although the legal age of sexual consent in the UK is 16 (see Sexual Offences Act 2003). According to UK think tank and charity The Fatherhood Institute, “Young fathers are generally defined as males under the age of 24 or 25” (Fatherhood Institute, 2013). Ladlow & Neale (2016, p. 113) define young fathers as “those under the age of twenty-five at entry into parenthood”. Berrington et al., (2005, p. 12), suggested young fathers are aged 23 or less, while other research has defined young fathers as anything from under 19 to under 24 (Hall & Hall, 2007). For the purposes of this research, I felt up to the age of 25 was too old, particularly as my interest in the topic had been sparked by the estimates of the number of fathers in the secure estate or young offender institutes, which tend to hold those up to the age of 21 (Gov.uk, n.d.b, Young People in

Custody). I had initially set a definition of a young father as someone aged 18 or under, particularly as those under this age would be legally defined as children, rather than adults (Children Act 1989, Schedule 1, paragraph 16), which I believed would add an extra element to the study. However, I realised this would severely limit the pool of available interviewees, see [3.4 Choosing a research setting](#). I was also aware that data from The Office for National Statistics: *Conceptions in England and Wales 2018* found that the conception rate for women under the age of 18 had decreased for the 11th year in a row. According to the figures:

In 2018, conception rates for under 18-year-olds in England and Wales declined by 6.1% to 16.8 conceptions per 1,000 women aged 15 to 17 years. Since 1999, conception rates for women aged under 18 years have decreased by 62.7% (Office for National Statistics, 2018).

Although this data fails to show the age of the father at the time of conception, it is not unreasonable to assume that this decreasing conception rate affected teenage or young fathers as well (Dudley, 2007), and limiting my research study to under 18s would not be beneficial. Therefore, I decided that I would seek to interview men aged 21 or under who were within the UK prison estate and were fathers, or fathers to be.

3.3 DECIDING THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

During the initial planning stages of this project, it was clear that I should decide my research methodology “based on the specific task in hand” (Silverman, 2017, p. 11), and that the method should, “grow naturally from the research question, and in turn from the social setting in which the research is carried out” (Holliday, 2016, p. 21). As the task was to understand the needs and experiences of young fathers in prison, I decided the best approach would be to undertake qualitative research that would involve interviewing young fathers, or fathers to be, within the prison environment, that is in the very place where their experiences took place. This decision also came from an interpretivist standpoint as the research was, “concerned with the empathic understanding

of human action rather than the forces that are deemed to act on it" (Bryman, 2016, p. 26) and that I would be looking at how young fathers "made sense of their own lives and experiences" (Mason, 2017, p. 8).

Using a more quantitative approach, for example creating a survey or questionnaire that could be distributed among participants, meant I would be missing out on the lived reality. I also felt a quantitative approach with structured questions would not allow me to build on answers given and potentially pursue different lines of narrative. Nor would it enable me to interpret the nuances of language and personality that I would be able to in a face-to-face interview. I felt being too structured in my approach may influence the study and negatively affect achieving the research aims. I also decided not to undertake a mixed methods study, which combines both qualitative and quantitative research methods (Bryman, 2016, p. 34), or to take a scientific approach by creating a hypothesis and then conducting research experiments to prove or disprove it (Ibid.), again because the aim of the research was to understand the needs and experiences of young fathers in prison at a very specific point in their fathering journey. In essence I wanted to study young fathers in prison, not just data (Nurse, 2002).

I am aware of the criticism of qualitative research being, "too subjective" (Bryman, 2016, p. 398), yet I had set out to obtain the subjective experiences of young fathers in prison, so this criticism did not concern me. I also believe that the qualitative approach was necessary to allow me to be closer to the data and to analyse it from a contextual standpoint, that is, I would seek, "an understanding of behaviour, values and beliefs and so on in terms of the context in which the research is conducted" (Bryman, 2016, p. 401). I am also aware of the challenges of using an interpretivist stance, that is, not to overinterpret and therefore misrepresent findings, and endeavour to be as honest as I can in describing how I have interpreted data within the analysis chapters (Mason, 2017, p. 133; Chowdhury, 2004; Nudzor, 2009; Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012).

I decided to undertake a qualitative study using semi-structured narrative interviews with young men in prison who were fathers, or about to become fathers. I chose the semi-structured approach to provide a guide to the interviews but also to create an element of flexibility (Mason, 2017; Schmidt, 2005; Rabionet, 2011; Bryman, 2016). I felt a narrative interview would help to get to the heart of the young fathers' experiences and by being semi-structured I would be able to pursue different narrative strands depending on the unique situation of each individual. Interviews would be individual and face-to-face, with the absence of distraction.

An important aspect of planning any research project is establishing the research setting (Mason, 2017, p. 149; Holliday, 2016, p. 34). As my research questions hinged on the experience of young fathers in prison, I could not achieve my objectives without interviews within the prison environment, which would allow me to, "look deeply into behaviour within specific social settings" (Holliday, 2016, p. 6). I felt that I would gather richer research data if I connected with young fathers within the bounded setting of the prison environment, and that the research would have a very different slant if I did not interview young fathers within a prison (Ibid., p. 35). Interviewing young fathers after they had finished a prison sentence for example, would not, I believed, give me the required insights as their needs and experiences would be described retrospectively. I was also conscious that trying to find willing participants outside of the prison environment could narrow the interviewee base. I was not sure where I would find ex-prisoners who were young fathers as they can be difficult to access, particularly those who have fractured or non-existent relationships with their children (Tyrer et al., 2005).

Although prison was the core setting, I also planned to interview those in peripheral settings as a way to connect the core setting to wider society (Holliday, 2016, p. 40). I planned to interview people from charities that worked with young fathers, and prison officers. I made some initial enquiries with a former chaplain at a young offender institute, however, on reflection I decided not to pursue this line of research as I was not convinced this would help me to answer specific research questions. While it

would allow me a different perspective on young fathers, I also felt it would distract from the aim of the research to attempt to understand the young fathers' unique lived experiences. I also contacted a charity for young fathers, who did not necessarily work with former prisoners, but a lack of resource their end meant any contact didn't go further. I also contacted the fathers' rights group Fathers 4 Justice, as I thought they would offer a view on the rights of the imprisoned father. However, I received a resounding silence to my enquiries and therefore also decided not to explore this avenue. I also decided very early on in the research process that I would not talk to the partners or ex-partners of the young men, or to any of their children. As the young dads were 21 or under many of their children were too young to be interviewed so this was not really a possibility, notwithstanding the fact that there has been an enormous amount written about the children of prisoners and I wanted my research to focus very much on the experience of the father. While talking to the partners or ex-partners of the young fathers would provide me with a counterpoint to what I learnt interviewing the young fathers, I also felt this would dilute the research aims. Equally, as the experiences of the interviewees bore out, the nature of young parenting relationships can often be disparate and frequently chaotic, thus it would have been a logistical challenge to talk to partners or ex-partners. I did conduct a couple of interviews with members of staff within the regional prison where I did the research, but this was not used in the final analysis. Thus, this study does not include data collected from any person other than the young fathers or fathers to be in prison.

Fully aware of the rights of any interviewees and understanding that I would have to get informed consent from those taking part, I decided nevertheless to pursue my initial objectives for the study. While I had some concerns about getting access to this cohort, I remained optimistic and, despite suggestions from my supervisors to think about alternatives, I decided to wait until I was indubitably in that situation before exploring other avenues.

In conclusion to this section, the methodology chosen for this study was a narrative semi-structured face-to-face interview conducted within an interpretivist framework. Using qualitative content text

analysis all interviews would be coded and categorised into themes, see [3.9 Analysing the data](#) for more information. These themes would then form the basis of my analysis chapters.

3.4 CHOOSING A RESEARCH SETTING

During 2017 I had the opportunity to visit prisons with a charity that organised arts-based education programmes to explore the themes of fatherhood and masculinity with offenders. I had been introduced to the CEO of this charity by one of my supervisors. Although the charity did not work with young fathers per se, they had substantial knowledge about fathers in prison and proved to be an invaluable source of support and advice during the initial stages of the study. The first of these visits was to a regional prison, where I attended an event for a group of prisoners who had graduated from one of the charity's courses on fathering. I had never been inside a prison before and, although nervous at the prospect, was pleasantly surprised by the way the prison, and the event, was set up. The prison itself was relatively modern, having been built in the late 1990s, and has a well-run and friendly visitor's centre, overseen by a charity. The prison sits on top of a hill overlooking the local town, a situation that, curiously, gives a feeling of space, with wide open skies, fields, and pastureland. Inside, much had been done by prison management and staff to improve the visiting facilities, particularly for young children, and the prison actively encourages visits. As part of the graduation ceremony the prisoners performed a play, with children, partners, friends, and family present. After the performance each man gave a personal declaration about what he felt he had achieved from the programme. The rest of the event consisted of food and discussions, with the men able to mingle freely. I found the experience largely positive and noted that the prison appeared to encourage offenders to explore and embrace their individual situations as fathers. Prison staff at the event were friendly and open, and appeared to have warm and solicitous relationships with the offenders.

In June 2017 I also attended a supporter's day for another of the charity's arts-based programmes, which invited offenders to explore the theme of masculinity. This event took place in an urban prison built in the Victorian era and proved to be a very different experience to the visit to the more modern, regional prison. I found the prison staff were less friendly and welcoming, and the building was rundown, with passageways and outside areas piled with litter. The room the event took place in had broken windows and graffiti on the walls. It did not feel like a particularly conducive place for offenders to explore their feelings as the programme required. The men taking part were halfway through the programme and the theme of the day was 'what's next?', where they were encouraged by their supporters – partners, friends, or family – and charity staff to discuss what they wanted to achieve throughout the rest of the programme. One of the men's supporters had not turned up that day – a common occurrence for many of the participants I learned – so I was asked to assist him with talking through his expectations for the remainder of the course. I was privileged to return to the urban prison later in the summer for the graduation event for this particular course. As with the fatherhood programme this involved the men performing a play, before stating their personal declarations. Afterwards there was food and discussion, and the men could enjoy unrestricted visits with their family and friends. This event took place in the prison's visiting hall, which was more welcoming than the previous room I had been in but was still unpleasant in comparison with the regional prison.

I make note of these visits as they were invaluable in helping me to decide where I would centre my energies when looking for a prison establishment to undertake my research. I realised that I had a better chance of working with the more modern, regional prison, than with the urban prison. The regional prison appeared to be more open to the ideas of researching and exploring fatherhood, and they were already working with fathers in prison. They also had a relatively mature visiting programme that encouraged visits from family and friends, recognising that this could help to reduce reoffending on release. I decided to concentrate on gaining access to young fathers through the regional establishment, which had the added advantage of not only being a men's adult prison, but of

having an adjacent young offender institute. Initially I had hoped to conduct all my research within a young offender institute, but after further reflection I realised this may result in a small pool of potential participants. According to the latest statistics about children in prison:

There was an average of just under 860 children in custody at any one time during the year.

This is a fall of 70% compared with ten years ago, with a 4% fall compared with the previous year (Ministry of Justice & Youth Justice Board, 2020, p. 37).

Children are defined here as young people aged between 10 and 17 years old. As fewer young people are being placed in custody, compared to the previous decade, I felt it would be challenging to find an adequate number of participants from just one establishment. As I had already established the criteria for participants was for them to be males aged 21 or under, as this still constituted a 'young father' (see [3.2 Defining the young father](#)), I was hopeful participants could be found across both establishments in the regional prison.

3.5 GAINING RESEARCH APPROVAL

After deciding the method and investigating a potential setting, the next stage in the process was to gain approval for the research to go ahead. This involved understanding the ethical issues that, "arise in a variety of stages in social research" and which, "cannot be ignored as they relate directly to the integrity of a piece of research" (Bryman, 2016, p. 120). I began the process to gain ethics approval from Birkbeck's School of Law Ethics Committee (Birkbeck, Research Ethics, n.d.). This involved filling out a form with a description of the research, the rationale behind it, proposed methodology, whether the research involved vulnerable people and any perceived risks to participants or the researcher. See [Appendix 1](#). As part of the submission, I also included an initial Information Sheet, outlining the research and intended to be given to any participants and an initial Consent Form, also intended to be given to any participants. The Information Sheet explained who I was, why I was undertaking the research, and what would happen with the interview data. The Consent Form

included consent for the interviews to be recorded, and information about withdrawing consent both during and after the interviews. I highlighted that there may be some emotional risk to participants as I would be asking them about personal and family matters, but that I would mitigate this by working with the prison to ensure there was adequate help and support post interview should it be required. I did not perceive any significant risk to myself as researcher other than the general fact I would be doing the research within a prison. Again, I sought to mitigate this risk by working with the prison staff to make sure I was following all appropriate rules.

Although not an ethics committee per se, I also had to gain approval from the HMPPS National Research Committee (NRC) (Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, n.d.), whose responsibility it is to not only assess the remit and the robustness of the research, but also to ensure, "matters of data protection/security and research ethics are dealt with in a consistent manner" (Ibid.). Their research application instructions states that extra precautions must be taken:

When research is undertaken with vulnerable offenders – such as young offenders, offenders with learning difficulties or those who are vulnerable due to psychological, mental disorder or medical circumstances (Ibid.).

As I was aiming to interview participants from a young offender institute, I was aware that the Information Sheet and Consent Form must explicitly describe the nature of the research and how I would use the participants' information. More information about this process can be found in [3.8 Undertaking the research.](#)

Another avenue of approval came from the chosen research setting. Initial email correspondence with my contact at the regional prison was positive and I was asked to fill out a research proposal form for the prison's Intervention Panel, which scrutinised all requests for research within the prison. The panel was due to meet a couple of months after I sent in the form. See [Appendix 3.](#)

Ethics approval from Birkbeck's School of Law came relatively swiftly but gaining approval from HMPPS NRC was a different matter. I embarked on the request for research approval by HMPPS NRC in early January 2018. This was initially hampered by technical and software issues, where downloadable forms on the HMPPS website were not compatible with my computer. After an initial flurry of contact with HMPPS I was forwarded a form which I filled in and sent, along with ethics approval confirmation from Birkbeck, the Information Sheet and Consent Form, and my CV, which were all requirements (see [Appendix 2](#) for the final HMPPS form). I had indicated the regional prison as the potential research establishment, but as I had not received confirmation from them, I noted in the form that the research establishment was 'not known at this stage'. This caused some confusion with HMPPS NRC who indicated they would not process my request until I had received confirmation from the regional prison. At the same time, the regional prison would not confirm acceptance of my research proposal until I had received approval from HMPPS NRC. Thus, I was stuck in a tangle of bureaucratic red tape.

I had not heard from the prison for a couple of months, so in early February 2018 I contacted them again, including my Birkbeck ethics approval, Information Sheet, Consent Form, CV, and their Intervention Panel research proposal form again. My proposal had not yet been through the Panel but had been scheduled for their next meeting. I also explained the situation with HMPPS NRC and was told by my contact that they might approve my proposal on the condition that I received NRC approval before undertaking the research. This would at least untangle some of that bureaucratic red tape.

However, later in February 2018 I received notice that my research proposal had been rejected by HMPPS NRC. This was due to a number of points, for example:

- I needed to show where I had made provision for any bi-lingual participants who wanted to undertake the interviews in Welsh
- I needed to show where I would assist participants with literacy and or language difficulties

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- I needed to provide more information on the recording device I was intending to use in interviews
- More information was needed on research questions and methods of data analysis
- I needed to show how participants could withdraw their consent after the interviews
- Suggestions were made about splitting Information Sheets into two; one for fathers; one for other participants in the research (e.g., prison officers)
- I needed to show what resources were available to any participants who may suffer distress after the interviews, as I had clearly indicated I would be talking to them about potentially emotional matters
- I needed to show how I would debrief participants

After some email discussions with my supervisors, I addressed the queries and resubmitted the form in March 2018. By this point I was also able to show that I had approval from the prison's Intervention Panel. To my dismay, in April 2018 my application was again rejected. This time it was requested that I create a debrief form, even though I felt I had included debrief information on the Information Sheet, as well as make it clearer to participants how they could withdraw consent at a later stage. Again, I felt as if I had already addressed this on the Information Sheet. After consultation with my supervisors, I made the requested amendments and resubmitted. At this point I admit to a surge of panic that I wouldn't be able to conduct any prison research and would have to abandon the PhD, as, as explained in [3.3 Deciding the research methodology](#), I did not feel that I would gain the perspective I was looking for, and achieve the aims of the study, if I could not interview young dads during their prison experience. Some appropriately calming words from my supervisors helped me to feel less panicked, and I waited for the response. I was delighted when, at the end of April 2018, my research proposal was accepted.

Prior to this, in March 2018, I had been invited back to the regional prison to discuss my research in more detail. This afforded me a great opportunity to outline some of my research criteria, and to

receive advice from the prison staff. The prison had a successful family wing which worked specifically with offenders and their families and I was concerned that any participants would only come from that wing. My concern was that men on the wing had, by the very virtue of being there, expressed an interest in improving their family relationships, and that if I only spoke to men already engaged in fathering, it would skew any potential results. However, I was assured that the participant pool would include other wings in the prison, as well as the adjacent young offender institute. In fact, only one of the eventual participants was from the family wing. During this visit it was suggested that I create some recruitment fliers that would be placed around the prison with the idea that interested prisoners could volunteer to participate in the research (see [Appendix 14](#) for examples in both Welsh and English). Members of the family support team would then screen any volunteers and help me to find suitable participants.

3.6 FINDING PARTICIPANTS

With all formal requests now approved I was offered two weeks in July 2018 when research interviews could take place. This was to be kept flexible, as research schedules are subject to change at the whims of the criminal justice system. The prison thought they would be able to find around 25 participants, which I was delighted with. As part of the research proposal, I had requested that participants be 21 years or under and one or more of the following: a father, stepfather, or father to be. I decided to include stepfathers as I thought it may provide insights into fathers who were not blood relations to their children and whether they experienced fatherhood differently. The reasons why they were in prison were out of scope of the study and, not wanting to limit the pool of potential participants, my only stipulation was that those convicted for crimes against their own children should not be included. My sense was that interviewing fathers who had committed crimes against their own children would add an element to the study that I would not be able to pursue fully, although I acknowledge there is a potential for further research into these fathers. I was asked if I would be

willing to speak to offenders in the Vulnerable Prisoner wing which, anecdotally, tended to house sex offenders, and agreed that I was, providing they did not fit into the stipulation.

Although recruitment fliers had been placed around suitable wings not all participants volunteered in response to them, and members of the family support team actively recruited men they knew were fathers, or who had expressed an interest in the research. This recruitment gleaned 20 prisoners, 18 from the main adult prison, and two from the young offender institute. All prisoners were 21 or under and fathers, fathers to be, or stepfathers. Two of the 18 from the main adult prison were on the Vulnerable Prisoner wing. There were a further two potential participants, but with last minute dropouts, transfers between prisons, and other machinations of prison life, it was not guaranteed that they would take part. I had been advised I could see up to four prisoners per day during the times usually allotted to lawyer's visits. This would mean I could see all 20 participants within a working week, with any additional participants in the following week. I now had 20 young fathers in prison to interview.

Research projects don't always go to plan (Bryman, 2016, pp. 3-14) particularly ones that involve a busy, complex establishment such as a prison, and there were the inevitable dropouts from the initial 20, leaving the final number of interviewees at 15. Four of the original participants declined to be interviewed at the last minute, and the fifth was not allowed out of his wing due to an incident, in which he was not involved. Two of the participants who refused to be interviewed were potentially interesting as they were brothers, one of whom was a stepfather. I had been intrigued to see how two members of the same family viewed and experienced fatherhood. Sadly, it was not to be, but there is, I suggest potential for further research in this area.

The remaining 15 participants are outlined below ahead of the analysis chapters. At the time of the interviews, six of them were aged 21, three aged 20, one aged 19, three aged 18, and the two participants from the young offender institute were aged 17. Four of the men were expectant fathers, including the two from the young offender institute. Six men had one child, one had a biological child

and a stepdaughter, one had two children, and the remaining two had one child and one on the way. Jake, now 20, had been the youngest to have a child, his son having been born when he was 15. I have given each participant an 'alias' name to protect their privacy. Where possible I have chosen alias names that reflect their ethnicity.

TABLE 1: OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPANTS

Alias	Age at interview	Child 1	Child 2
Kamil	21	Daughter, 6 mo.	Stepdaughter, 8 yrs.
Ryan	21	Son, 3 yrs.	N/A
Christopher	21	Son, 1 yr.	N/A
Dan	21	Baby due	N/A
Thomas	21	Daughter, 6 mo.	N/A
Jordan	21	Daughter, 3 yrs.	N/A
Jake	20	Son, 5 yrs.	N/A
Simon	20	Daughter, 3 yrs.	Daughter, 1 yr.
Lester	20	Son, 8 mo.	Baby due (different mother from baby 1)
Seth	19	Son, 2 yrs.	Baby son due (different mother from baby 1)
Mo	18	Baby son due	N/A
Jonny	18	Son, 2 yrs.	N/A
Scott	18	Son, 18 mo.	N/A
Jamil	17	Baby due	N/A
Asif	17	Baby son due	N/A

As part of the interviews, participants were asked to describe their ethnicity. Six of the 15 participants (40%) described themselves as from a black and minority ethnic (BAME) group. While it is widely recognised that people from BAME backgrounds are disproportionately represented within the UK criminal justice system (Uhrig, 2016; Wainwright & Larkins, 2020), this is a significant increase on the average prison population, which is estimated at 27%. According to a report on the experiences of rehabilitation and release planning among minority ethnic prisoners within the general prison population:

Black and minority ethnic (BME) groups are greatly overrepresented in the prison population: as of March 2020, 27% of prisoners were from a BME background, compared with only 13% of the general population (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, 2020a).

However, the percentage of those with a BAME background rises within young people in custody.

According to UK Government figures (Gov.uk, 2020) 27.8% of young people in custody self-reported as black, and 8.9% as Asian, or 'other', that is non-white, making a combined total of 36.7%, which is closer to the percentage in this study. A report about Children in Custody from Her Majesty's

Inspectorate of Prisons (2020b) found that 54% of young people in custody reported as non-white.

Note here that there is the potential for further research about the intersectionality of masculinity

and ethnicities within the prison environment. The higher percentage of young men from BAME

backgrounds in this study is also indicative of research that shows that incidents of teenage or young pregnancy tend to be higher in this group (Berthoud, 2001; Nurse, 2002; Wei, Loeber & Stouthamer-

Loeber, 2002; Clayton, 2016). Therefore, I feel like the self-reported ethnicities within this cohort

largely match that of young people in custody and higher incidents of young parenthood in BAME

groups. I will note here that while race is a factor in the wider research into young offenders and

teenage or young fathers, I did not ask any specific questions about race or culture in this study, other than to ask each participant to self-report their ethnicity.

TABLE 2: ETHNICITY OF PARTICIPANTS

Alias	Ethnicity
Kamil	Mixed other
Ryan	Welsh
Christopher	White British
Dan	Welsh
Thomas	White British
Jordan	Welsh
Jake	Welsh
Simon	White British
Lester	Black Caribbean

Seth	Welsh
Mo	British Caribbean
Jonny	White Asian
Scott	White British
Jamil	Black British
Asif	British Caribbean

During the interviews I also discovered whether the men were present at the birth of their child or children, whether they had lived with their child prior to coming to prison, and where their child resided while they were in prison. This information is discussed in more detail during the analysis chapters, but an overview is provided here. This is of course not applicable to the men who were expecting their first babies.

TABLE 3: BIRTH AND RESIDENCY

Alias	Present at birth	Residency pre-prison	Child residency now
Kamil	Yes (biological daughter)	Yes	Lives with mother
Ryan	Yes	No	Lives with mother
Christopher	No (in prison)	No	Lives with mother in prison
Thomas	No (in prison)	No	Lives with foster parents
Jordan	Yes	No	Lives with mother
Jake	Yes	Shared residency	Lives with mother
Simon	Yes (for both)	Shared residency	Lives with mother
Lester	No	No	Lives with mother
Seth	Yes	No	Lives with mother
Jonny	Yes	Son, 2 yrs.	Lives with mother
Scott	Yes	Son, 18 mo.	Lives with mother
Jamil	N/A	N/A	N/A
Asif	N/A	N/A	N/A
Dan	N/A	N/A	N/A
Mo	N/A	N/A	N/A

During the analysis chapters I will be referring to the information contained in the above tables regularly. Whenever I discuss a particular participant's experiences I will use their name and their age at the time of the interview.

3.7 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Throughout the approval process I had been working on my interview questions. Although I had chosen to undertake a semi-structured interview, rather than a questionnaire, I still wanted to focus on particular interest areas within the research aims and required questions as a guide for the interviews. My provisional research questions, as submitted to both HMPPS NRC and the prison for their consideration were:

1. Can you tell me a bit about your children?

[Prompt: How many children do you have? If expectant dad: When is the baby due? Can you tell me a bit about the pregnancy, have you seen scans for example?]

2. Did you live with the child/children before you were sentenced?

[If yes: Who else lived with you and the child/children? If no: How often did you see the child/children before you were sentenced?]

[Prompt: What sorts of things did you like doing with your children?]

[Skip this question if expectant dad]

3. Who looks after the child/children at the moment?

[Skip this question if expectant dad]

4. How do you get on with the children's mum/mum-to-be?

5. What do you think makes a good dad?

6. What do you think the responsibilities of being a dad are?

7. Do you think mums and dads have different roles and responsibilities?

8. How would you describe your role in your child's life before prison?

9. What contact do you have with your child/children at the moment?
10. How would you describe your role in your child's life now?
11. Tell me what it's like being a dad in prison. Is there anything that helps you to be a dad?
12. What's the biggest barrier to being a dad in prison?
13. What would you like to see more of?
14. Can you remember if anyone asked you if you were a dad, for example the police, your lawyer, the judge in your case?
15. Do you think your parenting situation was taken into account when you were sentenced?
16. Have you taken part in any parenting classes or programmes?
[If yes: what are the main things you've learnt from them?]
17. Have you thought about being a dad when you're released? Do you have any plans?
18. When you were growing up who were the important people in your life?
[Prompt: Why were they important? What did they do?]
19. Is there anything else you'd like to add about your experience of being a dad in prison?

I chose the initial questions in the hope they would garner me the greatest information about the actual experience of the young fathers. I included prompts for some of the questions, anticipating that some participants may need more drawing out than others. After consultation with my supervisors, I decided not to ask a direct question about the participant's own fathers. This was due to the assumption that these young men may not have had the best relationships with their own fathers and that asking such a direct question might cause them to stop talking or become agitated. Towards the end of each interview, I intended to ask a question about who was most important in their lives when growing up, as this would open the discussion to other family members, not just fathers. However, during most interviews the participants did talk about their fathers, some in more detail than others. This is described in more detail in [5.6 Being a son](#). I also did not request information about the crime each participant was in prison for as I felt this was irrelevant to the study, although in

some interviews the participants did offer this information. Even when this information was volunteered, I have not included it in this thesis unless necessary.

There were a few questions I did not ask and, in hindsight, they would have provided useful information during my analysis. Firstly, I did not ask whether any of the pregnancies were planned nor any questions about sex education or whether they used contraception. This was due to cautiousness on my part not to come across as accusatory or to make assumptions. I did not ask whether any of the young fathers or mothers had suggested abortion or adoption or any other avenue for the baby, again for the above reasons. I had assumed that the pregnancies were unplanned, and this assumption was, to a certain extent, borne out by the interviews. Only one interviewee, Simon, 21, talked about a child being planned and “really wanted”. Finally, I did not ask whether the interviewees were registered on the birth certificates of their child or children, and therefore whether they had parental responsibility. This would have been extremely useful information as knowledge of the law around parenting and their rights as fathers became an important theme in the analysis, and I have had to make some assumptions. See [7.6 The Law](#).

I largely stuck to the questions for each interview, and they provided useful prompts and guidance. I did not do a pilot interview but decided to use my first day of interviews to reflect on the questions and see whether I wanted to make any changes. After a period of reflection when the first three interviews had been completed on day one, I did add further questions to the list. These were whether they had attended the birth, and what they would like their children to say about them as a father in the future. The latter question was asked because many of the young men had negative opinions of their own fathers, and I wanted to explore more about what they would like their children to think of them.

3.8 UNDERTAKING THE RESEARCH

As well as the research questions there were a number of documents required as part of the research logistics. I provided three versions of each of the following documents, which included one written in 'Easy Read' language (Gov.uk, 2010), a standard version, and one intended for any non-prisoners I interviewed:

- Information Sheet, see [Appendix 4](#); [Appendix 5](#); [Appendix 6](#)
- Informed Consent Form, see [Appendix 7](#); [Appendix 8](#); [Appendix 9](#)
- Debrief form, see [Appendix 10](#); [Appendix 11](#); [Appendix 12](#)

I ended up using the easy read versions for all the interviews. As I did not pursue interviewing non-prisoners those versions remained unused.

All interviews had been organised and managed by members of the prison's family support team. The team proved to be an invaluable source of information, help and, at times, much-needed humour throughout the research. Apart from the head of the team all members I met were female, who seemed to have warm and supportive relationships with the prisoners. While they did not discuss any personal information with me, they appeared to truly care about the prisoners and knew their families, friends, and backgrounds. The interviews took place in what was known as the upper lounge. This was a spacious room situated above the main visiting room. It was mostly used for closed or Social Security visits. The room was large with toilet facilities at one end. There were a number of comfortable sofas and one half of the room was taken up by a play area with books and toys for any children visiting. There were also a couple of stands with baby baths on top and dolls, which were used to teach men how to bathe babies and change nappies. The windows were open but barred and looked out on to the prison's busy recycling area. Next to the upper lounge there was a small room with a large television screen inside. This was used as the Skype room, where men could take video calls. The family support office was also next to the upper lounge, so I was able to call on the support workers if needed and could also pop in there for refreshments.

Each participant was escorted to their interview by a prison officer, who then left the room. Members of the family team did not attend the interviews with participants from the adult prison. A member of the family team and a liaison officer from the young offender institute sat in the room during the two interviews with the participants from that wing (Jamil and Asif, both 17), due to their age. However, they sat at the other end of the room and did not participate in any aspect of the interview.

Two of the interviewees from the adult unit, Kamil, 21, and Jonny, 18, were on Assessment, Care in Custody and Treatment (ACCT) orders (Gov.uk., 2019). In these interviews support staff did interrupt the interviews briefly after 30 minutes, to check that everything was OK. For both interviews I was asked by the family support team to provide a written comment on the demeanour of the participants throughout the interview.

After the interviews I spoke briefly to the family support team to let them know how I thought the interview had gone, and whether I had any concerns about the participants. The only participant I did have concerns about was Ryan, 21, who had become tearful during his interview. I told one of the prison officers that Ryan had become upset and he said he would check on him. When I ended each interview I had a chat with each participant, asking them if they were OK and going through the Debrief Form with them. As part of the Debrief Form I included information about who the participants could contact if they felt distressed after having discussed their families. This included the family support team, Safer Custody, the prison chaplain, Listeners and The Samaritans.

One interview (Jordan, 21) was interrupted when another inmate needed to use the upper lounge room for a visit with Social Services. Jordan and I moved into the video room and continued the interview from there. I did not feel this disrupted the interview, in fact it served to put both myself and Jordan at ease as we chatted while we were waiting for the video room to be cleared and were both relaxed when the interview restarted.

Each interview started with my explaining the research and running the participant through the Information Sheet. I also asked them to sign the Informed Consent Form if they were happy for the interview to continue. I informed them that they could withdraw their consent at any time during or after the interview. I asked again if they were happy to be recorded and if they agreed I turned on the recording device. I also took some notes although tried to keep this at a minimum so that my attention was fully on the interviewee and they did not feel like they were being studied. I particularly wanted the interviews to feel more like conversations than something more formal (Mason, 2017). I was also able to offer the participants squash to drink, which was fortuitous as it turned out to be one of the hottest weeks of the year. I had also brought in biscuits, although curiously only one of the interviewees indulged, with one participant explaining his refusal by telling me, “you don’t get this body by eating biscuits!”.

Throughout all the interviews I was aware of my own positionality and that this may affect the interviews. As a white female in her 40s I could potentially be seen as an establishment figure by the participants, and this may have affected the answers they gave me. A couple of the participants initially thought I was from Social Services, for example, so may have told me what they thought I wanted to hear. I endeavoured to make the interviews as informal as possible so the participants felt they could chat freely with me and, personally I felt that the participants did feel comfortable talking to me about their lives and experiences. Only Seth, 19, seemed to be reticent about telling me more about his life and I felt that his interview was perhaps not as revealing as some of the others. However, this is supposition on my part.

I started with the same set of questions for each interview, but allowed scope for new topics to be raised, depending on the direction the interview was taking. I was allowed a maximum of 60 minutes per interview, except with Asif, 17, who only had 15 minutes available. The average time with each participant was around 35 minutes. At the end of each interview, I thanked each participant then talked them through the Debrief Form, as discussed above. I reiterated that they could withdraw

consent for their information to be used up to six months after the date of the interview. I then turned off the recorder. Each participant was escorted from the room by a member of prison staff. Time between interviews was spent either working on my notes, preparing for the next interview, or talking to the family services team, which was often a welcome respite. When interviews were finished for the day a member of the team escorted me out of the prison to the visitors' centre.

3.9 ANALYSING THE DATA

After each day of interviews, I spent some time collating and tidying any written notes as well as reflecting on how the interviews were going and whether I needed to amend or add any questions. As mentioned in [3.7 Interview questions](#), I did add questions after the first day of interviews but did not do so after that other than during the natural flow of conversation where I needed to draw more information out of a participant. During the evening of the first day, I replayed the interviews to check on quality and to assess my interview technique. During this assessment I realised I had, unintentionally, started to answer the questions myself, particularly when the interviewee was taking time to answer, or did not seem particularly forthcoming. I was essentially talking to fill in any silences that occurred and concluded this was down to nervousness on my part. Even though interviewing is an integral part of my career, this was the first time I had interviewed convicted prisoners within the prison environment. On reflection I don't believe this skewed the results in a significant way although when analysing the interview data I did take particular care with how I interpreted the answers in the first three interviews. However, I did realise I would have to be more aware of this trait and disciplined in my approach for the rest of the interviews (Holliday, 2016, p. 147). Although it would be challenging with limited time with each participant, I would need to allow them space to form their answers, and not to answer for them, particularly as this could be seen as influencing the data (ibid., p. 70). This was an important piece of self-reflection and a useful learning for the rest of the interview schedule.

I spent five days in the prison doing the interviews. Although I checked the recordings after each interview, I did not attempt to transcribe the interviews in full until after they were all completed. In order to organise the transcriptions, I decided to use the qualitative data analysis tool MAXQDA. I was able to upload the audio files from the recording device to the software programme and transcribe the interviews from there. Once all the interview files were uploaded to MAXQDA I deleted them all from the recording device in line with privacy requirements and ethical considerations. Transcription is defined as an “integral process in the qualitative analysis of language data” (Lapadat, 2000, p. 203). I decided to do all the transcription work manually myself rather than use an agency or transcription software. I felt this would bring me closer to the data and I could also start recognising patterns and themes across the interviews, thereby the transcription exercise became the first stage of the analysis, as Lapadat describes:

The process of doing transcription also promotes intense familiarity with the data, which leads to the methodological and theoretical thinking essential to interpretation (Lapadat, 2000, p. 204).

I decided to use a more interpretive and denaturalised model of transcription (Ibid., p. 209) and include dialect, verbal fillers, and speech disfluencies and to point out in the text where a participant laughed or paused significantly. I wanted the data to reflect the true voices of the interviewees. Transcription was a time-consuming task but extremely valuable (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999; Lapadat, 2000) as it did bring me much closer to the data. Once all the interviews were transcribed, I checked them again before deleting the audio files from MAXQDA in line with ethical and privacy considerations. I was then left with the text transcriptions from each interview.

The next stage in the analysis was to code the textual data using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a way to, “seek to unearth the themes salient in a text at different levels” (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 387) and lends itself to the interpretivist strategy I had adopted in analysing the interview data. This is in line with research that shows, “the act of identifying themes within text, among other components

of the data analysis process, is itself a highly interpretive endeavour” (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012, p. 13). Thematic analysis treats the interview texts as data and, “codes are developed by the investigator during close examination of the texts as salient themes emerge inductively from the texts” (Neuendorff, 2018, p. 212; see also Holliday, 2016, p. 102). I broadly used the six stages of thematic analysis, as outlined in Braun & Clarke, (2013). These are:

1. Familiarising yourself with the data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

When compiling my interview questions, I had grouped similar questions as a way of providing some structure to the interviews. I realised I had given myself some starting themes, for example, there were, broadly, questions about the participant’s child or children, relationship with the mother of those children, their perceptions of fatherhood, their life as fathers within the prison estate, their relationships with other family members, for example their own fathers, and their hopes for their future lives as fathers. I did not want these themes to drive my analysis and thereby limit it, but they did prove to be a useful starting point and, while transcribing the interviews within MAXQDA, I did keep these themes in mind. However, the interview data proved that while the questions may have been unconsciously themed, the answers the participants gave were not and there were various additions, deletions, and amendments to those initial core themes. During transcription and subsequent analysis, I also found there were sub-themes developing. For example, in a main theme about relationships – other than with that of the mother of their children – I found that several of the participants talked about the strong bonds they had with their grandmothers, or ‘nans’ in the vernacular. Equally, when I asked the question about what a good dad was, I was expecting some

participants to talk about fathers in the media, or people they knew who they perceived as ‘good dads’. I was surprised that the majority could not name anyone at all and were in fact stumped by the question. Thus, this pre-supposed theme was turned on its head. After several readings of the interview data, I was able to establish four key themes which make up the analysis chapters, these are:

1. Becoming a dad
2. Being a good dad
3. The importance of relationships
4. Limiting fatherhood

I will discuss these in further detail in the concluding section to this chapter.

3.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

As with all qualitative research projects of this nature there are limitations (Anderson, 2010) and I seek to raise some of them here. I wish to comment on the number of participants in the study. The most appropriate sample size for qualitative studies has been long debated, with guidance suggesting, “anywhere from 5 to 50 participants as adequate” (Dworking, 2012). I was aware that the number of participants (15) may not be seen as providing a fulsome enough research base. However, as explained in [3.3 Deciding the research methodology](#), the aim of this study was not to undergo a quantitative analysis of young fathers in prison, but to capture a moment of lived reality in these young men’s lives. Taking the view that the sample size fit the scope of the study and the research design and aims (Morse, 2000; Silverman, 2016), plus the richness of the data I gathered during the interviews, I feel that 15 participants is more than adequate. Notwithstanding that, I was privileged to hear 15 very different stories from the participants which, although they resulted in common themes were ultimately unique.

I was also aware that I had limited time with each participant. As discussed in [3.8 Undertaking the research](#), I was allotted 60 minutes with each participant, apart from Asif, 17, but the average time spent with each participant was around 35 minutes. It could be suggested that this was not adequate time to glean the information I required. However, I would argue that the richness within the answers I received shows that there had been enough time to capture these young men's perceptions and experiences of fatherhood at that particular moment.

Another limitation is that I cannot guarantee that the interviewees did not exaggerate or did not tell the truth. As Holliday states, "It is certainly not the case that what people say is hard evidence of what they think" (Holliday, 2016, p. 70). They might well have been lying or telling me what they thought I wanted to hear, and I am aware of the distinct possibility of social desirability bias playing a role in the interviews (see Lavrakas, 2008; Grimm, 2010; Krumpal, 2013). The very fact of my presence may have affected their responses (Anderson, 2010). Would their answers have been different if they had been talking to a male researcher, or a researcher closer to their own age, for example. In addition, some of the participants initially thought I was from Social Services, or that I was linked to Social Services in some way. There was a marked fear and mistrust of Social Services (see [7.5 The Social](#)), thus I cannot discount that they may have not divulged certain details if they thought they would find their way back to Social Services. As part of the Information Sheet and Consent Form, I did stress that nothing that was said in the interviews would be used in anything but this research project, unless I felt that something they said suggested they wished to harm themselves or others. For those interviewees who asked me whether I was from or linked to Social Services, I reiterated the fact I was not. Nevertheless, I must be mindful that this may have limited some of the interview data.

There is also my positionality within the interviews to consider (Fawcett & Hearn, 2004; Cousin, 2010; Bourke, 2014; Qin, 2016). It is well documented, particularly with the growth of interpretivism within qualitative research, that, "all researchers into human activities brought their own subjectivity to the

research table” (Cousin, 2010, p. 9) and that, “the presence of the researcher is recognised as part of the setting” (Holliday, 2016, p. 70). As well as interrogating my positionality at the start of the interviews, I also endeavoured to maintain a dialogue of self-reflection throughout the interviews and analysis stages of the study (Fawcett & Hearn, 2004, p. 201). Rather than intending to minimise subjectivity, my strategy was to continuously remain aware of my positionality and how this may affect the research, in other words, “the self is the research tool” (Cousin, 2010, p. 10; see also Holliday, 2016, p. 145). The participants’ lives and experiences are entirely unfamiliar to my own life and experiences, notwithstanding the obvious differences such as gender, age, education, and ethnicity, and despite the Welsh connection with some of the participants, I needed to be aware that my life and experiences essentially become inseparable from the research process. While I acknowledge that for some this may be seen as a limitation to the research, I used this reflexive thinking as part of my methodology (Holliday, 2016, p. 146) and it forms a significant part of this thesis (Ibid., p. 152).

Another potential limitation is that this is not a longitudinal study, meaning I cannot return to the participants in a year or five years’ time to see if their perceptions of fatherhood have remained the same, or if their desires to be good dads has borne fruit. A longitudinal study, say for example one which did follow young fathers in the prison system over a number of years, has the potential to augment our understanding of these young men’s journeys as fathers and how their perceptions of fatherhood, and their relationships with their children, evolve over time. These findings could help to establish policies and practice that provide further support for fathers in prison. However, I return again to the research aims in that this study was always about the needs and experiences of young fathers while in prison, at a specific moment in time.

Aligned with this, those interviewees who were expecting children could only talk about their experiences of being an expectant father, and not of actual fathering itself. It can be argued that their answers are thus assumptions of how they think they would act or what they would do when their

children were born. Initially this may seem contradictory to the research aim to discover the needs and experiences of being a young father in prison, as these men were not actually yet fathers.

However, each of these young men provided a richness within their stories that offered an extra dimension to the research as a whole.

In [1.1 Background to the research](#), I explained that trying to find an official number of young men in prison who are fathers was extremely challenging. While this creates an obstacle for gaining certainty in research, it also allows prisoners a choice to tell or not to tell the prison that they have a child.

Although it could also be argued that even if this information was requested, the prisoner might not tell the truth. The young men in this study had all been open with the prison about their fatherhood status and it could be argued that this cohort were more willing to discuss their perceptions and experiences of fatherhood rather than say, a prisoner who did not wish the prison to know they were a father. An assumption can be made that there may be nuances in how the men who do not reveal details of their children feel about their experiences of fatherhood. However, without men admitting they were fathers to the prison authorities I would have been unable to undertake the research, so any nuances in interview output will not be within the scope of this research. In other words, I could not interview men who did not admit to being fathers to see if their experiences differed.

Finally, I made the decision not to talk to the partners or ex-partners, families, or children of the young men in the study. After initially considering doing so, I also made the decision not to interview prison staff or those who worked with young fathers or young men in prison. The intention was to focus entirely on the lived experiences of the participants and to capture their thoughts at a specific moment in time. I am aware that this means I do not have an alternative perception of the young men's experiences. It could be argued that this means I could not see the whole truth of a situation. Yet it was not the truth I was seeking, but the participant's own beliefs. We all view situations from different perspectives. It was the perspective of the young fathers in prison that was central to the research aims.

3.11 A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

As I will be quoting extensively from interview text it is important to make a note here about terminology. I had taken a denaturalised approach to transcription (Bucholtz, 2000; Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005; Davidson, 2009) in that I remained faithful to what was said in the interviews. This was an attempt to truly allow the participants' distinctive voices to be heard. Including verbatim quotes in research has become standard practice as they can provide context, evidence, and explanation (Cordon & Sainsbury, 2006). I was keen to use verbatim quotations throughout the analysis chapters and again used a reflexive approach to transcription by constantly remaining aware of how I was interpreting the interview content (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005). However, using a denaturalised approach also brings specific challenges, particularly around the use of slang, diction, or pronunciation as, "All languages contain slang, lingo, idioms and euphemisms" (Ibid.) I was aware that there were a number of terms used by the interviewees that require some description. For example, each interviewee had their own way of referring to the mother or mothers of their child or children and their relationship with them. This ranged from "baby mamma" (Lester, 20) to "my missus" (Jordan, 21) to simply "her" (Asif, 17). It is beyond the scope of this research to understand the origins of the various terms but is useful to note. To reduce the number of terms used within these chapters and for the sake of clarity I have used the word 'partner' for those women who were still in relationships with the interviewees at the time of the interview, or 'ex-partner' for those women who had, at some point, been in a relationship with the interviewee, but were no longer in a relationship at the time of the interview. I have also used the term 'mother' for those women who were not and never had been in relationships with the interviewees. When using direct quotations from the interviews I have quoted the vernacular used.

Defining relationships, particularly in adolescents or younger people, is notoriously tricky (Furman & Hand, 2006). None of the interviewees was married – either to the mother of their children or anyone else – and, as they were in prison none of them were currently co-habiting. One interviewee (Simon,

20) discussed marriage to his partner and his intention to propose to her on his release, but he had not lived with her permanently before coming to prison due to issues with Social Services and the fact she was fostering a younger sibling. In fact, only one interviewee (Kamil, 21) had been living with his partner directly before coming to prison and only one (Dan, 21) was intending to move in with his partner and their child after his release. Thus, it is challenging to categorise the relationship status of these men outside the normative conventions of marriage or co-habiting. However, as the analysis chapters progress, I will be discussing how the mother/father relationship is often integral to the man's experience of fatherhood, so to provide some clarity I have defined those in a relationship as having an attachment to their child's mother, or "physical intimacy, caretaking, and love and romance" (Furman & Hand, 2006, p. 176). This is to distinguish from those not currently in a relationship.

Other terms that require noting here include 'padmate', which is a prison term for a cellmate, and the phrase 'on the out,' which was used frequently to describe life outside prison, both past and future. Another prison term was 'landing', which was used to describe the wing where a participant lived. Many of the young men talked about their grandparents, particularly their grandmothers. The vernacular used to describe their grandmothers was 'nan' for most of the young men, and I have used this in verbatim quotations, see [6.5 The importance of nans](#). The final term to be noted is 'the Social', which was used to describe Social Services or any involvement with local authorities. Again, I have quoted this term when it was used by a participant. See [7.5 The Social](#).

3.12 CONCLUSIONS TO THIS CHAPTER

While my intention was to choose a methodology that supported my research aims, I was always determined that I wanted to talk face-to-face with young fathers within the prison environment and to listen to what they had to say. Deciding on a strategy to pursue qualitative, semi-structured, narrative interviews came easily. This strategy naturally goes hand-in-hand with an interpretivist

framework and, I also feel that due to my career as a journalist, writer, and editor I have acquired skills that allow me to interpret information while reflecting on my own positionality within the research domain. The strategy and methodology for the research felt very natural. The richness of the data collected shows, I believe, that I chose the correct methodology for the purposes of the study, and it is the analysis of this data that I now present in the following four chapters.

During transcription of the interviews, and my analysis of the transcribed text, four clear themes emerged. It is these four themes that structure the following chapters. They are:

1. Becoming a father
2. Being a good dad
3. The importance of relationships
4. Limiting fatherhood

Each analysis chapter begins with an introduction, in which I lay out the reasons for deciding the particular theme. I then continue to show my analysis of the data within each theme, using verbatim quotes where necessary, but also remaining aware of the fact of my own interpretations of the data. Where possible, I refer to extant literature to provide context, and within each chapter I make recommendations that could be attributed to future policy decisions. Each analysis chapter ends with a concluding section. Note that when citing quotes from the interviews I have included my own questions and distinguished them by using a bold font. The first analysis chapter follows the theme Becoming a dad.

CHAPTER 4: BECOMING A DAD

4.1 INTRODUCTION

During analysis of the data one theme emerged that provided a starting point for these analysis chapters. As young fathers with relatively young children (those participants who were already fathers had children ranging from new-born to five-years old), finding out about the pregnancy was still a recent event, as was attending or not attending the birth. As a result, their discovering they were to become fathers, and their first impressions of being a father were discussed at length during the interviews. For those expectant fathers, finding out about the pregnancy was relatively new, and again was discussed at length. This first analysis chapter deals with those very beginnings of each participant's journey to becoming a dad.

As will be discussed in [4.2 Hearing about the pregnancy](#), there is little evidence to suggest any of the pregnancies were planned, so hearing their partner or ex-partner was pregnant was, for some, the first time they'd ever considered fatherhood. This chapter focuses on the young men's experiences of finding out they were going to be fathers and their emotional responses to hearing the news, through to the birth of the child or children and their experiences of initial childcare. For the expectant fathers, thoughts on the forthcoming birth are discussed, as well as their experiences of and level of involvement with the pregnancy. Also included in this chapter is an analysis of the interviewees' comments on their age when becoming fathers or hearing about a pregnancy.

4.2 HEARING ABOUT THE PREGNANCY

"She end up pregnant so... and she said yes she wanted to keep it and that so I said fair enough", Lester, 20

Each man's journey to becoming a father started when they heard about the pregnancy. There is limited research into men's (and particularly young men's) experiences of a partner or non-partner's pregnancy and how this affects their transition into parenthood (Finnbogadóttir, Svalenius & Persson, 2003; Buston, 2010; Gage & Kirk, 2016). All the interviewees had been informed of the pregnancy at

some stage before the baby was born (or is expected to be born) with none of the fathers being presented with a baby they had not known was on its way, or certainly none of them admitted that that had been the case. This suggests that all 15 interviewees had some relationship or connection with the child/children's mother(s) – at least enough for them to be informed of the pregnancy – and that they believed they were the biological fathers of the children. I did not ask any specific questions about whether any of the interviewees had questioned the paternity of the child/children they'd been told were theirs. Only one interviewee (Thomas, 21) discussed undergoing a DNA test to ensure he was the father of his daughter, while another (Lester, 20), said his ex-partner had at one time claimed the child was not his but he believed he was the child's father. Thomas and Lester's situations will be discussed in more detail later in this section. An assumption can be made that as all 15 young men volunteered to participate in the interviews, they believed they were the biological fathers, accepted some level of responsibility for being the fathers and had some level of commitment to their child or children. Only one interviewee (Kamil, 21) had a stepchild, although this was not in the legal sense as he was not married to the mother. Although, as discussed in [3.10 Limitations of the research](#), I cannot discount the possibility of social desirability bias in the participants' answers, and they may not have revealed any doubts about paternity to me during these interviews. Equally, I sensed a certain naivety in some of the participant's answers, and often a lack of agency in their attitudes, as if they just believed what they had been told. It could be that these young men simply assumed they were the biological fathers of their children, without questioning it, see [7.3 Asking for help and support](#).

While I had not asked a specific question about whether any of the pregnancies were planned or not, it became apparent as the interviews progressed that news of the pregnancy was unexpected and came as a shock. Indeed, shock was the dominant emotion for many of the interviewees, even if they were in relationships with the mothers. This would suggest that the pregnancies were not planned, which correlates with research into teenage/young pregnancies, which proposes that the majority of pregnancies to under-18s are unintended (Quinton, Pollock & Golding, 2002; Tyrer et al, 2006; Buston, 2010; Department of Children, Families & Schools, 2010). However, research into first time

fathers in Sweden found many felt a sense of, “unreality... irrespective of whether the pregnancy was planned or not” (Finnbogadóttir, Svalenius & Persson, 2003, p. 98), which suggests that *any* father hearing about a pregnancy might find themselves experiencing feelings of shock and have difficulty absorbing the news whether they were young, old, in a relationship or not. Thus, it cannot be automatically assumed that all the pregnancies were unplanned just because an interviewee expressed shock at finding out about a pregnancy, particularly as no specific question was asked. Nevertheless, during the interviews some men expressly revealed that the pregnancy had not been planned, or that they had not been expecting the news, which suggests the majority of pregnancies were not planned. It also became increasingly clear that shock was not always a negative reaction, and that an unplanned pregnancy did not necessarily mean an unwanted baby, which coheres with other research into teenage pregnancies, (Phoenix, 1990; Speak et al., 1997; Hirst, Formby & Owen, 2006). Indeed, after the initial feelings of shock many of the young men expressed joy at being fathers or were looking forward to the births of their babies.

For example, Jonny, 18, admitted that hearing his partner was pregnant, “was a big shock”. Both he and his partner had been 16 when his son, now two, was born, and said finding out about the pregnancy, “was hard at the time because it wasn’t planned or anything”. However, since the birth of his son he’d come to terms with being a dad and said, “*I think it’s the best thing I done in life now*”. This suggests that being a father had provided some self-worth and a sense of pride and that, for Jonny, it was a positive experience.

Expectant father Jamil, 17, also expressed shock on finding out his partner, 16, was pregnant:

When did you find out?

Well, I found out like a month before I came in here.

OK. And what was that like?

Pffft. Shock.

Despite experiencing shock at the news, Jamil revealed that he was excited for the birth, saying, "I'm looking forward to it man, can't wait, literally, it's shocking but I really can't wait for it, that day to come up you know?" This suggests that, while the pregnancy was unplanned, the baby was not unwanted, and Jamil was looking forward to becoming a father. This again reinforces findings from previous research that unplanned does not necessarily mean unwanted (Phoenix, 1991; Hirst, Formby & Owen, 2006).

For expectant father Dan, 21, the news of his partner's pregnancy came just over a week after he'd come to prison:

My girlfriend... she rung and informed me, that, yeah, I was gonna be a dad, so it was quite a shock to the system to be honest, yeah.

For Dan, experiencing his first prison sentence and admitting to finding prison life difficult, the timing of the news was not ideal, and he was still finding it hard to process the news six weeks later:

Obviously not the best timing, um, obviously if I could choose better timing it wouldn't be this time it'd be obviously in the future. But I just gotta deal with the situation now, so... It was a shock to the system, yeah.

Yeah. How did you deal with that?

I... it took me a day, a couple of days to you know get, get it into my head, to be honest still, still now it's still a bit of a... it's daunting like for obvious reasons but... I've just gotta take it, take it now, take it on the chin and, um, get on with it.

I interpreted from the level of shock Dan experienced that the pregnancy was unplanned, although coming to terms with the news could be attributed to the general feelings of shock about coming into prison for the first time, something that Dan discussed at length. Despite this, he was also excited about becoming a father, seeing it as something positive in his future:

I'm looking forward to it as well to be honest. It gives me something to look forward to, for when I get out like.

Again, affirming the assumption that even though the pregnancy was unplanned, the baby was not unwanted and that becoming a father was a positive experience and something to look forward to. This coheres with research discussed in the literature review, that shows becoming a parent could be a turning point in a prisoner's life (Magaletta & Herbst, 2001; Monsbakken, Lyngstad & Skardhamar, 2013).

Lester, 20, did not express shock at finding out about either his first, or second, child, however neither pregnancy, with two different mothers, appeared to be planned, as he explained:

Ah, so basically my first baby munna, mumma, I was with her for a while, so like five months or something like that, we wasn't planning on having any, any kids at all or nuttin' at all but then um we broke up she end up pregnant, um, last year March she end up pregnant so... and she said yes she wanted to keep it and that so I said fair enough, OK, I don't mind that. I don't mind having a son, you know what I mean? And then she end up having it on October the, the 19th, yeah, last year, so that's my first son, and then my second one now he's due in two, two weeks? Two weeks six days, something like that yeah? And basically that happened last year, in October as well, so...

The fact Lester and his ex-partner were not planning on having children suggests the matter had been discussed between them at some point, although I did not question this further. Also, the level of detail Lester used when discussing the current pregnancy and due date of his second child suggests he was mentally engaged with the idea and was interested in the pregnancy. Again, this affirms the assumption that the children were unplanned but not unwanted, further affirmed by Lester's admission that, "I don't mind having a son". While not the most effusive of statements, it does suggest that he was happy about being a father and had not mentally abandoned his child.

Note here Lester's description of the conception as, "she end up pregnant", suggesting that the mother had become pregnant by herself and that he had had nothing to do with it. This highlights the lack of agency some men showed in their responses, suggesting they did not feel they had any control over the situation. Lester's attitude towards the pregnancy coheres with research with young fathers in a young offender institute that found, "the belief and/or acceptance that it is the woman's prerogative to decide the outcome of the pregnancy" (Buston, 2010, p. 2215), in other words that the young men questioned were largely left out of any decisions about a pregnancy. Lester was one of the few interviewees who had no contact with his children and had no definite plans for future contact or to see his soon to be born son. It could be surmised that Lester felt either removed from his children or was unwilling to accept any responsibility for them. However, Lester appeared quite emotionally aware of his children despite having no concrete plans to see them, so it could be that he had distanced himself from them in a way to protect himself because he felt he didn't have any control over the situation. In other words that the mothers of his children were the ones in control and with the responsibility. This coheres with research discussed in the literature review that shows the relationship a prisoner has with the mother of his children is of vital importance when it comes to contact (Speake, Cameron & Gilroy, 1997). See [6.4. Gatekeeper mums](#) for more discussion on this.

Expectant father Asif, 17, was one of only two interviewees who was not and had not been in a relationship with the mother of his soon to be born child. Aside from Asif and Christopher, 21, the other 13 men had all been in some kind of relationship with the mothers, even if they had since broken up. Asif had been shocked by news of the pregnancy, which was the result of sex he'd had with a girl at a party:

...I'd known her for like two days, after the party obviously slept with her, took her out for food the next day, and then a week later I come to jail, and then a month after that I got a phone call... I knew it was her, so I said oh, she told me she was pregnant. It was all a big shock to me.

Asif discussed how it had taken him a while to get over the shock:

Do you think you've got over the shock now?

Yeah, I got over the shock now. But at the start, at January, February times, my head weren't right to be honest.

The idea of his head not being 'right' suggests the pregnancy was not planned (as circumstances would also suggest) and that Asif found the news difficult to accept. He did not mention any concerns he may have had about whether he was the father of the baby either. Later in the interview Asif described changing his mind about the baby after a period of reflection:

Then, then I didn't want nothing to do with it and that, now I've realised I've got to be there for my son.

After questioning him further it became clear that during the period of reflection Asif had thought about his relationship with his own father, and wanted to do things differently:

Yeah, I had a long think about it, all the time, and I was thinking my dad weren't there for me so, I'm, I'm gonna make sure that I'm there for my son.

This idea of righting the perceived wrongs of their own fathers was a common theme among interviewees and will be examined in [Chapter 5: Being a good dad](#).

Simon, 20, father of two daughters, admitted finding out about the first pregnancy, when he was 17, was a big shock:

And the first time like it was like, it was an accident you know so I was in shock like, I didn't know where my head was, you know what I mean?

Simon clearly states that the pregnancy was unplanned, and that the shock had affected his mental state, suggesting the emotion was negative. Simon admitted his second daughter was "really wanted"

and did not discuss being shocked at hearing news of that pregnancy. However, it was not clear whether the second pregnancy was planned, only that the pregnancy was not unwanted, and no specific question was asked to confirm this. Despite the initial shock experienced when he heard about the first pregnancy, Simon later discussed his joy about being a father, telling me, "I love everything about, everything about being a dad. Know what I mean?" Again, this confirms the assumption that although the children were not planned, they were not unwanted and that being a father was important to Simon.

For Christopher, 21, finding out he was going to be a father at 20 had proved challenging emotionally, as he explained, "At first I did have doubts about it, 'cos I didn't really want a child". Christopher was one of only two interviewees who had not been in a relationship with the mother of his child, describing the circumstances of the conception as, "a mad thing". As with Asif, 17, there appeared to have been a period of reflection where Christopher spent time thinking about being a parent and had made a conscious decision to 'take the baby on':

And then I said, d'you know what, I'm gonna be a man about it, I'm gonna take him on and be the best dad I can be, d'you know what I mean? 'Cos I wouldn't wish that upon anybody. So...

Christopher admitted he was excited at the prospect of seeing his son, "I'm looking forward to it, I'm very excited to see him. I can't wait". Later explaining that seeing his son would be, "a new start, a new future". Despite initial shock for what was clearly an unplanned pregnancy, Christopher saw being a father as a positive experience, providing hope for the future, echoing research discussed in the literature review as parenting being a turning point for prisoners (Magaletta & Herbst, 2001; Monsbakken, Lyngstad & Skardhamar, 2013).

While Asif and Christopher were not and never had been in relationships with the mothers of their children, it does not seem as if their experiences of shock as a negative emotion, then finding a positive side to the situation, was because they were not in long term relationships. Many of the

interviewees discussed feeling shocked and having to take time out to 'get their heads around' the idea of becoming a father, even when they were in relationships. It could be argued that the relationship status of these young men, or what they felt about the mothers of their children, were not factors in whether they were shocked at hearing about a pregnancy, nor in whether the pregnancy was unplanned or not. This backs up research from Sweden that suggests any man can feel a sense of 'unreality' at hearing they are to become a father (Finnbogadóttir, Svalenius & Persson, 2003). This does, however, contradict Buston's findings that how a young father felt about a pregnancy, "appeared in large part to depend on how they felt about the woman involved" (Buston, 2010, p. 2214).

Three of the fathers interviewed discussed different emotions to shock on hearing about the pregnancies. For example, expectant father Mo, 18, was happy when his partner told him she was pregnant and felt like he was doing well by not running away, even if he was not with her physically:

I'm 18 innit, most kids my age and that when like their girlfriend gets pregnant and that like they run away, or they're not happy and that when my, when my girlfriend told me she was pregnant I was happy innit, but...

There are two points to note in Mo's response. Firstly, that he discusses his age, calling himself a 'kid' and suggesting that he is young to be a father. Secondly the use of the term, "when like their girlfriend gets pregnant", suggesting somehow that this is something the girl has done to herself, rather than it being the responsibility of two people. This is much like Lester, 20, whose girlfriend had, "end up pregnant" and again shows that lack of agency some of the participants appeared to feel.

Mo was upbeat about becoming a father, seeing it as something positive in his future, saying: "... can't wait, I think about it every day." He also revealed that he already had a name for his soon to be born son, which was a tribute to a friend of his who had died. Mo is another example of a young father

whose child was unplanned but definitely not unwanted, and who was looking forward to being a father.

For Jordan, 21, news of his then partner's pregnancy when he was 18 had been a joyful experience. He had been so delighted when he heard about the baby, he had proudly spread the news across social media. Here he talks about the difference between his reaction to the pregnancy and a friend's reaction to the news of his own child:

His first one is three weeks younger than my one, so I was like, so I found out, I found out my missus was pregnant on Christmas, Christmas Eve, but he kept his quiet until a month until she was due, and I was like why's that? Because he didn't want, he's one of these ones who's Christian you know he didn't want to jeopardise it he wanted to keep it so quiet because if he did say something, something would have jinxed him and something bad happened but he... well I dunno I was just like that, yeah, straight up everywhere.

Telling everyone were you?

Yeah, Facebook, social media, everywhere. Viral. Everyone found out in like, days, but he was one of those ones that kept it quiet...

Jordan was now facing contact issues with his daughter after a break down in relations with his ex-partner (discussed in [Chapter 6: The importance of relationships](#)) but maintained that the birth of his daughter was the "best day" of his life. Again, affirming that the children of these young fathers were not unwanted and the idea and experience of being a father was a positive one.

Thomas, 21, had perhaps the most contrasting experience of hearing about a pregnancy as his then partner had told him she was pregnant but was disputing whether he was the father, as he explains:

So did you, did you know she was pregnant [before you came to prison]?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. She was saying that there was a potential four fathers, because in, in anger, and then when it come back to the DNA proved that it was mine, she said she'd made the other, she made the other names up.

So you went, you did a DNA thing?

I had a DNA yeah.

Thomas had already experienced a paternity dispute in a previous relationship, in which he had lived with a woman and her child, who she'd insisted was his. He had not believed he was the biological father and had undergone a DNA test, which revealed the child was not his and the relationship had broken up. It is worth noting here that Thomas was the only participant to discuss DNA testing, suggesting the other participants were not concerned about formally establishing paternity, that they had not thought about it, or that they just did not wish to tell me they questioned the paternity.

Paternity testing is the most widely used genetic test (Richards, 2010, p. 101) and, while it can tell us, "whether the putative father produced the sperm that was involved in the conception of the child" (Ibid.; see also Bainham, 1999), a test cannot guarantee that a father has parental responsibility for his child or children if that father is not married to the mother of the child and is not registered on the child's birth certificate. Thus, a paternity test can show who is the biological father, but that is not the same as the legal father with parental responsibility. In Thomas' case, he not only took a DNA test but also went to court to get his name added to the child's birth certificate so that he could gain parental responsibility. This part of Thomas' fathering journey will be discussed in more detail in [7.6 The Law](#), but note here that, for Thomas, his first experiences of fatherhood were legal.

In conclusion to this section, my interpretation of the data was that, for most of the young fathers, finding out about the pregnancy was an emotional experience, and the predominant emotion was one of shock. This is not an uncommon reaction according to research into teen or young fathers (Tyrer et al., 2005; Condon et al., 2006; Hirst, Formby & Owen, 2006; Buston, 2010). Other emotions

included happiness and delight, as well as concern and anxiety. Only one of the fathers (Thomas, 21) had questioned the paternity of the child on hearing of the pregnancy, which was later resolved with a DNA test, which he had requested. This suggests the other 14 interviewees believed they were the fathers of the children, with none of them suggesting they had questioned paternity or the veracity of the child or children's mothers. Even Lester, 20, when told by his ex-partner that the child was not his did not believe her, as he explained:

Yeah, like clashing, clashing and sometimes she telling me it's not mine or, saying stuff like that but, I knew it was mine. You know what I'm saying so, yeah? I'm happy, I'm happy to be fair that he's my son. You know what I mean?

This could suggest both a level of responsibility and commitment to the child or children, or a lack of agency. Did they not question the paternity because they were wholeheartedly committed to that child, or did they not question the paternity because they did not feel they could?

In retrospect I would have asked more questions about the circumstances around conception. Were these young men using contraception, for example? Had they not had any sex education and did not understand that unprotected sex could lead to pregnancy? Had contraception failed, or had they and their partners simply not thought about it? Was it as Buston found that "Most of the men had given little or no thought to the possibility of a sexual partner becoming pregnant" (Buston, 2010, p. 2212)? While I did not ask specific questions about contraception or sex education, none of the young men mentioned either of these subjects. This could be because these matters are of an intimate nature and the young men did not wish to discuss contraception choices with me, or it could be because they just had not thought it would happen to them.

The UK Labour Government's Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, launched in 1999 via the newly formed Social Exclusion Unit, focused heavily on sex education and access to contraception as key factors in preventing teenage pregnancies in the UK (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999; Department of Children,

Families & Schools, 2010). While I do not know if the young men I interviewed had received access to sex education and contraception advice, there is room for further research into whether the factors the Labour Government focused on so heavily reached those who were perhaps the most vulnerable. Although a specific question about whether terminating the pregnancy had been discussed was not asked, none of the young fathers talked about abortion. None of the young fathers talked about having the baby adopted after birth, or the child being looked after by someone other than the mother, i.e., a family member either, although again no specific question was asked. Note there is the possibility these options had been discussed, but that the participants did not feel comfortable talking about them. From the interview data my interpretation was that, despite some initial misgivings for some of the young men, after a period of reflection they had accepted their situation as fathers, and that although the pregnancies appear to be unplanned, the children were not unwanted and they enjoyed being fathers or were looking forward to becoming fathers. This coheres with earlier research that shows young fathers don't necessarily see becoming a father as detrimental to their lives, and that they show a level of obligation and responsibility to their children (Marsiglio, 1993; Rivara, Sweeney & Henderson, 1986; Clayton, 2016, cited in Miller, 1997, p. 57).

4.3 BEING A YOUNG DAD

"Growing up, I never expected I'd have a kid this young like, to be honest"

Dan, 21

According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2019), the average age of all fathers of babies born in 2019 was 33.6 years old. While there is data showing the average age of first-time mothers in the ONS figures (28.9 years), there is no such distinction for fathers and the average given is for *all* fathers to *all* babies born in 2019. This omission in the data highlights the disparity between the information gathered on mothers, and that on fathers. Note also that the ONS figures do not include

births where information about the fathers is unknown, i.e., they are not named on a birth certificate. Although almost all births (95%) in the UK are registered by both mother and father this figure drops to 75% for births to teenage mothers (Burgess & Goldman, 2018, p. 14). This means 25% of births to teenage mothers are sole registered, i.e., only the mother is on the birth certificate. With a significant number of fathers omitted from birth certificates, this could bring the average age of fathers down. Although not all births to teenage mothers involve a teenage father, there is research to show that the majority of these births are to fathers either in their teens or their twenties, and who therefore would be considered young fathers (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Dudley, 2007; Hall & Hall, 2007, cited in Clayton, 2016, p. 131). Thus, without having all the information on fathers, we cannot guarantee that the average age of fathers shown by the ONS is completely accurate. This aside, with the average age of a father in the UK in 2019 being 12 years older than the oldest interviewee, we are reminded that the young men in the study are a statistical anomaly and in many cases are seen as deviating from the norm (Clayton, 2016, p. 131). This also introduces the question of whether the age at which these men became or are about to become fathers affects their needs and experiences. As young fathers they are already marginalised within society so does the fact they are also in prison make their journey into fatherhood doubly challenging?

The age when the interviewees had first become fathers or expected to become fathers ranged from 15 (Jake, now 20) to 21 (Thomas, and expectant father Dan). Awareness of their age was a common discussion topic among the interviewees, with some of them talking about how they had not expected to become a father so early in their lives. This coheres with research into young fathers such as that from Speake, Cameron & Gilroy (1997) which showed that, "None of the 40 men involved in the study had intended to become a father at that point in their lives". This could be because social norms suggest that parenthood should be delayed until people are in their thirties (Clayton, 2016, p. 131) and therefore these young men simply had not expected fatherhood to occur so early. For example, when discussing how he felt about his partner's pregnancy, father to be Jamil, 17, revealed, "I thought it would have been a bit later on and that, to be honest." The assumption can be made that

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Jamil had thought about becoming a father at some stage in his life but was not expecting it to happen when he was a teenager.

Dan, 21, seemed to find the idea of the pregnancy and being a father challenging because of his age, despite being one of the oldest of the interviewees and not yet a dad:

It's gonna be, it's gonna be crazy to be honest, it is, I never expected like, growing up, I never expected I'd have a kid this young like, to be honest, I know kids, some people have kids even younger than this these days like but...

Like Jamil, this suggests Dan had thought about being a father at some stage but had expected it to be later on, possibly to fit with societal norms.

Jake, 20 had been 15 when his son was born, making him the youngest to become a father among the interviewees. He admitted the situation had been hard and strange for him at that age:

15 is young to have a, a baby... It's weird having a child young, because... you're not stable enough. And it all needs [to be] stable... then you also work as well so it makes it harder again. I dunno. Madness, innit?

Note here how Jake talks about stability, suggesting that he thinks to be a parent requires some level of economic, emotional, or perhaps general life stability. He also talked about his age being a factor in his reaction to the pregnancy and that being so young appeared to increase the shock:

The first time, like, I dunno, it was just so strange for me and then, like, because I was so young as well. I was, I was in so much shock, I didn't know what I was expecting you know like that, it...

Christopher, 21, who admitted he had initially ignored the fact he was to become a father, talked about his age and how he had been too young when he'd first heard the news:

I just think I was young, I was too young to be put in this position, and, and then I realised, well I've done it, I've made, I've made him, I've gotta be there for him.

Note here Christopher's use of language. Rather like Lester and Jamil, whose partners had 'ended up' or 'found' themselves pregnant, Christopher states that he was, "too young to be put in this position". This could be interpreted as Christopher believing he had no choice in the matter and was not responsible for the pregnancy or for making any decisions about the pregnancy, highlighting the lack of agency in these young men's lives. It could also be interpreted that some of the interviewees used their age as an excuse for immature behaviour or for not taking responsibility for their children. For example, Christopher, 21, explained how he had not seen his child before he came to prison because he was not mature enough to handle the situation:

It has hurt me that I wasn't grown up enough to be able to go and see him at that time, and I was basically I was acting like a child and I needed to be a man about it.

Simon, 20, had been 17 when his first daughter was born, and had found the situation challenging, partly because of his age:

Because I was so young as well. I was, I was in so much shock, I didn't know what I was expecting you know like that, it... I dunno a bit terrifying.

He explained that when his second daughter was born, when he was 19, he felt better able to deal with the situation, despite still being a teenager, "I was just more mature. I was more grown up about things. I was only young the first time". Simon notes he was "only young" when his first daughter was born, yet at 19 years of age at the birth of his second daughter, he would still be considered a young father by societal norms.

Kamil, 21, who had a six-month-old child, said he was, "pretty young to have a daughter" despite being one of the oldest interviewees. He was also the only interviewee to have a stepchild. He

explained that he'd met his partner when he was 19 and she was 24 and her daughter had then been six years old. He had found the reality of being a father challenging:

And becoming a dad at that age, like, stepping up, it was stepping up a game... It was really hard, like 'cos it was a big step for me in life, I'm only a young age.

Kamil's comments about his age both when he became a stepparent to his partner's daughter, and at the birth of his own daughter, show an awareness both of the fact he is considered young to be a father by society's conventions, but also that becoming a parent, whether biological or step, is an important stage in a person's life and one to be taken seriously.

Jordan, now 21, discussed how he had matured since his daughter had been born, "Obviously I was only 18 and all when she was born as well, I've changed", and "Obviously I was only, when she come out I was just turned 18, so, obviously I had no experience", his use of the terms "only" and "obviously" suggesting that any immaturity or lack of experience was down to his age. Jonny, 18, also used the phrase, "only 16" to describe the age he had been when his son was born. This awareness of their status as young dads suggests the research group were cognisant of the fact they were living outside societal norms.

My analysis of the interviews shows that, while understanding their age as fathers may place them outside of society's norms, the participants still expressed joy about being fathers, and in many cases talked about their children or children to be with extreme fondness and love. This directly opposes the discourse that teenage or young fathers are feckless and ignorant and don't care about their children (Duncan, 2005; Clayton, 2016; Ladlow & Neale, 2016). In fact, for many of the interviewees becoming a father was an extremely positive event in their lives, despite initial misgivings. This view is further highlighted in the next section, which is an examination of the discussions about the births or impending births of these young men's children.

4.4 ATTENDING THE BIRTH

“Best day of my life”, Jordan, 21

Around 90% of fathers in the UK attend the birth of their children (Burgess & Goldman, 2018, p. 36) although this percentage drops to below half in couples that are not co-habiting (Kiernan & Smith, 2003, cited in Burgess & Goldman, 2018, p. 36). The percentage of men in this study who attended the births of their children sits somewhere in the middle at 73% – eight of the 11 young men who were already fathers. These eight participants all appeared to have been very engaged with the birth of their children. This is contrary to research that suggests young fathers in particular can often feel excluded from births (Ashley et al., 2006, cited in Maxwell et al., 2021, p. 164). This could be because this cohort were especially engaged with the births or, as Jomeen (2017) found, some men who don't attend the birth of their children can be subject to social censure. Therefore, the participants could have attended the births because they felt they had to. Of the three that had not attended the birth, two had been in prison at the time, (Christopher 21, and Thomas, 21) and the third, Lester, 20, did not find out about the birth until after it had happened.

According to the interview data attending the birth was a very natural thing for the young men to do. All of those who had been able to attend the birth, or knew that it was happening, had been present. From my interpretation of the data these young men were not forced into going to the births; they genuinely wanted and expected to be there. This suggests a desire to not only take responsibility as fathers, but also to establish involvement from the very beginning. Note that I could not guarantee that the participants actually had attended the births and they could have been saying what they thought I wanted to hear, yet those who admitted to attending a birth described a mixture of emotions ranging from utter terror to absolute joy that, I believe, could not have been sustained if they were not telling the truth. For example, Seth, 19, summed up the whole experience rather succinctly:

And were you at the birth of your first baby?

Yeah.

Tell me, tell me a bit about that, what was that like?

Shit myself.

Jordan, 21, who had been 18 when his daughter was born, had found watching her birth incredibly emotional, as he explained:

Were you at the birth?

Yeah, I was at the birth.

What was, tell me a bit about that, what was that like?

Best day of my life.

Was it?

Yeah. Being there obviously we went through it all, through all those scans then when we went to hospital and seeing her come out and cutting the umbilical [sic] cord I was like yeah, then I holded [sic] her straight away. It was the best feeling. So I know I've got my own little flesh and blood, and when I holded her I started crying, when I first holded her, I know, I've made something into this world, so I was happy like.

Kamil, 21, had also found the birth of his daughter emotional, admitting to being terrified by the whole event and concerned for what his partner was experiencing. He had been 20 at the time of the birth.

I was at the birth. Scary.

And what was that like?

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From my point of view?

Yeah.

Terrifying! It's a different situation. The er, the pain they go through, it's horrendous.

Kamil discussed the circumstances up to and including the birth of his daughter in great detail. He explained that he had been asleep when his partner's waters broke and did not believe the baby was coming at first, "But when I heard the terms, 'I think she's coming', I soon damn woke up straight away". He also talked about how the experience had been very different to the Channel 4 television show *One Born Every Minute* (Channel 4, *One Born Every Minute*, n.d.):

It was, it was different like, to see it happen. Like, to watch One Born Every Minute, which she watches, I'm a bit squirmish [sic], but watching it was... it's erm, it's something you can't explain it... it's something special.

When asked whether he felt his presence at the birth had been helpful to his partner, Kamil responded:

I felt like I could help because she wanted to hold my hand. She wanted the support of me being there. So I stayed up the head, the head end. [Laughs].

Simon, 20, had found the birth of his first daughter a strange experience, but had been more involved with the birth of his second.

Did you go to the births and stuff?

Yeah, yeah.

What was that like?

That was um...huh...it was... [Laughs].

Pretty...[laughs], was it, was it really strange or was it exciting?

The first time, like, I dunno, it was just so strange for me and then, like, because I was so young as well. I was, I was in so much shock, I didn't know what I was expecting you know like that, it... I dunno a bit terrifying but the second time I really wanted the second one as well so... I was more supportive and like, I, I dunno like, it was a lot easier for me because I really wanted the baby, you know what I mean? And the first time like it was like, it was an accident you know so I was in shock like, I didn't know where my head was, you know what I mean?

Jonny, 18, admitted the birth of his son had been, “terrifying”, while Scott, 18, described the birth of his son as: “... an experience I'll never forget, that's for sure”, and “eye opening”. Both had been 16 at the time of the births. Ryan, 21, had also been at the birth of his son, but relationships with the mother of the child and her family had gone downhill afterwards:

For starters, I was at the birth, everything was going fine, it wasn't 'til Social Services got involved where I assaulted her father.

Ryan was now battling Social Services to see his son which will be discussed in [7.5 The Social](#).

Jake, 20, had been 15 when his son was born, but had attended the birth, supported by his mother:

But yeah, I was there, yeah I was at the birth and everything... My mum was behind me, and it was just her [former partner] on her own.

Of the three fathers who had not been at the birth of their children, Lester, 20, had not known that the birth was happening, while Christopher, 21, had not been able to attend as he initially said his son was born in prison, and Thomas, 21, had been in prison himself. I did not ask either Thomas or Christopher whether they had applied to attend the birth on a supervised visit or for a release on temporary licence (ROTL), although the literature on ROTL currently does not state any provision for male prisoners to be allowed to attend the birth of a child (Ministry of Justice, 2020a). Not only had Thomas and Christopher not attended the births they were also the only ones among the interviewees who had yet to meet their child. While this may be merely coincidental, it could also

suggest that being present at the child's birth is an indicator of the father's relationship with the mother. As they had not attended the births, the relationship with the mother was poor, and that was why they had not seen their children. Equally however, both Christopher and Thomas said they were in prison when their child was born, which would also account for them not being present at the birth.

Thomas had particular difficulties with his daughter's mother and there was a restraining order against him seeing her. Although I did not ask for more details of the restraining order, it is likely to have been granted under Section 5 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. Thomas later said this order was for 10 years, which seems excessive but is not uncommon. Another potential reason why Thomas did not see his daughter was because the child was being looked after by her mother's foster parents, who did not bring the baby in for visits. Thomas would have to wait until his release before attempting to see his daughter, which would be dependent on whether he fulfilled requirements set out by Social Services, see [7.5 The Social](#) for more details.

Christopher's, 21, situation was unique among the other young men in that his son had been born in prison and was now living with its mother in a mother and baby unit. However, it should be noted that later in his interview there was some confusion over whether the baby had actually been born in prison. Whatever the truth, the baby had been born one month before Christopher had come to prison. Christopher had not attended the birth (whether it occurred in or out of prison) and had not met his son, which appeared to be a cause of regret, as he had initially refused to see the child, as he said, "I wish I didn't ignore the fact that I had the child at the start and I got to see him before I came to here". Now that Christopher had had a chance to process his emotions about becoming a father, he was looking forward to seeing his son.

Lester, 20, had a poor relationship with his first son's mother and only found out about the birth through a friend, as he explained:

Well I didn't get to go to the birth 'cos me and her was on and off and we weren't like, I wasn't really mature, she wasn't really mature so it was a bit of a battle with me and her at the end of the day and I, I really wanted to go 'cos he's my first son, you know what I mean?... I didn't find out you know what I mean? I found out from a friend. So by the time I found out from a friend yeah? He was already been born and that so, there was a bit of disappointment there but... I couldn't have done anything about it. I get...

This would appear to corroborate my interpretation that those men who attended the births had stronger relationships with the mothers of their children as, clearly, Lester did not have a good relationship with his first son's mother.

According to the research data, all the young fathers who had been able to attend the births of their children had found the experience an emotional one, with descriptions ranging from the truly fearful to the ecstatic. I found their discussions of the births particularly affecting as they showed a breadth of maturity and emotional intelligence that I admit I was not expecting. I was also interested to note how natural it was for these men to attend the births, having grown up in a generation where men did not automatically do so. My own father had dropped my mother off at the hospital gates when her waters broke during her pregnancy with me, returning home to await any news. In the next section I discuss the birth plans of the fathers to be. Obviously, I could not ask the expectant dads about their experience of attending the birth, so the list of questions was altered slightly to ask them about their thoughts on the impending birth, and their experiences of the pregnancy so far.

4.5 EXPECTATIONS

"I've missed the birth itself, that's the most upsetting thing, that I'm not gonna be there", Dan, 21

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Six of the young men were expectant dads, four were first-time dads, and two, Seth, 19, and Lester, 20, were expecting their second child. Seth and Lester's experiences of the births of their first children are covered in the previous section. Their experiences of the second pregnancy and their thoughts about the forthcoming births are covered in the following section. Of the six expectant dads Seth, 19, Lester, 20, Mo, 18, Dan, 21, and Asif, 17, would all be in prison for the birth. Jamil's, 17, release was scheduled before the birth and he was hoping to be there, "cos, my dad wasn't there for me like that", suggesting that, to Jamil, being a father meant being involved from the beginning, including attending the birth. Jamil had a strong relationship with his partner and talked at length about his feelings about the birth. When asked about his concerns or worries he responded:

I've never been there at a birth and literally I don't know what to expect, that's the only thing that I'm scared about, apart from that... When I see blood, I faint. Not faint but I get lightheaded, like if I was to cut myself really badly I'd faint like, if I don't sit down, have a water and get fresh air I'd faint straight away.

You'll have to stay up by her head won't you?

[Laughs] I don't wanna see all the blood. But I'm...

But it's good you're gonna be there.

I'm looking forward to it man, can't wait, literally, it's shocking but I really can't wait for it, that day to come up you know...

As his partner was quite early in the pregnancy, they had yet to have a scan, and he discussed with enthusiasm the prospect that they might be having twins:

Yeah, she thinks it's gonna be twins. I got a lotta twins in my family about three sets of twins, four.

What would you do if it was twins? Double!

Double trouble [laughs]. I don't know what I'd do man. I'd still be there same though but, I don't know how I'd react, two babies on one arm, mental, oh well, waiting to see that day if she's gonna be twins, hopefully it's just one, take it slow for now.

Jamil's interview shows clearly that although the pregnancy was unplanned, the child, or children, were not unwanted, and that he had thought a lot about being a father and was looking forward to it, even if he had concerns about being at the birth.

Dan, 21, was hoping an upcoming appeal would see his sentence reduced so he could be present at the birth of his child. He did not discuss trying to get a temporary release to attend the birth if this did not happen. He seemed particularly concerned that he would not be at the birth and not be able to support his partner, with whom he had a strong relationship:

It's gonna be tough, specially, if I don't, if I don't get to go to the birth itself, that's gonna be one of probably the hardest things for me, like, you know not to be there to be supporting her, even though I know there's gonna be family there supporting her, it's not gonna be the same... so yeah, that, that is gonna be tough. It's one of my biggest worries. When I found, when I found out the news that she was pregnant as well that was one of the first things that went through my mind. That I was gonna be in here. And not only it just being sad, it's, it's embarrassing for me as well, for me, myself like, knowing that I'm gonna be in prison when my first child is gonna be born like, so yeah. It's not nice really, not nice at all like.

Dan had evidently spent time thinking about the fact he would not be present at the birth and that this would be a negative experience, even though he was planning to be there for the rest of his child's life.

I'll be there for all of the baby's life basically, apart from the first, initial couple of months, which is upsetting to me that I've missed the birth itself, that's the most upsetting thing, that I'm not gonna be there, but...

Rather like Jamil wanting to be at the birth because his own father had not been around, Dan clearly saw attending the birth as an essential part of his journey to becoming a father. This also suggests a desire to fit with the social convention of fathers attending births, particularly his use of the term “embarrassed” to describe how he feels about not being able to attend, because he will be in prison.

The other expectant dads did not appear to me to be quite so concerned that they would be missing the birth. However, all of them had discussed the forthcoming event with the prison authorities in some capacity and had some ideas about what would happen when the baby arrived. Asif, 17, had asked if he would be allowed out for the birth, “I won’t be allowed out, I asked and I won’t be allowed out...” I did not question Asif further on why he had been refused. While Mo, 18, said, “I got told I can have a picture with him on a visit and that, so...” and I interpreted that he seemed to be content with that. In fact, when asked what he was worried about in relation to the birth, Mo was more concerned about his relationship with his partner than missing the birth:

My main concern is like um, you know what like falling out with my, my baby mum and just breaking up and you know like, when you’re in jail you think all these things innit like, sorta like, er, sometimes I think oh she’s gonna break up, if she gonna find someone else or someone else could be raising my kid. That’s, that’s, that’s, that’s my main concerns really.

Research has shown it is not uncommon for young men to be concerned about their relationships with their partners while in prison (Nurse, 2002). However, it could also be argued that as an expectant father Mo’s concept of fathering was abstract and that his main worries would naturally rest on his partner.

Lester, 20, was hoping for a visit or some photographs soon after the birth of his second child to a different partner, but nothing seemed to have been arranged formally:

...but she’s looking to when he’s, when he’s born and stuff like that, looking to come and see me and let me see him, you know what I mean? Not straight away but I’m gonna be getting

photos of my son you know what I mean, seeing how he look, stuff like that, I'm gonna be phoning her, seeing how he is all the time, so, yeah? And when he's a bit, a bit older then she can come and bring him to see me yeah?

I asked all the expectant dads how involved they felt in the pregnancy, and all of them admitted taking an interest. Some, particularly Dan, 21, and Jamil, 17, expressed concerns and worries for their partners. Dan spoke to his partner every day and was concerned that she was looking after herself:

Yeah, yeah, I ask her, I ask her every day about how she's feeling and how her stomach is, how her day's been in general... I'm just making sure she's not exerting herself and doing too much and, you know, not, just make sure she's looking after herself basically, it's hard for me because, when I was out there obviously I'd be making sure she's alright but I can't tell for certain that she is taking care of herself but...

He was looking forward to a visit from his partner the following day and was excited at the prospect that there might be a 'baby bump':

So there'll be a bit of a bump tomorrow then?

Yeah I know! I know! Yeah, I been asking her, and she said there's something coming, so, yeah.

Jamil, 17, was also concerned about his pregnant partner, "I'm worried innit. I don't want her to be stressing about it and whatnot." He tried to talk to his partner every day, when his phone credit allowed, and they talked about the pregnancy:

She says that she's going through a lot right now, because of the sun as well. She said sun's getting to her, she nearly had a sunstroke. Her back's hurting. She said her feet's weird. She just went for a blood appointment, so she got a scan coming up this month so...

Despite this concern and his evident involvement with the pregnancy, there was some confusion over when the baby was actually due. Initially, Jamil had told me the baby was due in October or November. He later changed his mind.

So... so if baby's due in October is she five months?

Nah, not yet, god no, that's just an estimate, it could be December, I don't know, it's an estimate to be honest, I don't know when it's due but that's just me calculating in my head, but I think you know when they do the scan and that.

Despite this timing confusion there was still evidently good communication between Jamil and his partner, and, like Dan, he had been somewhat intrigued by the baby bump:

So, have you seen a picture of the baby bump?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I've seen...

What's it like?

It's alright you know? I've touched it and that yeah? It's kinda hard. It's weird. Thought it would be soft. Not soft, but the skin feels weird. I thought it would have been a bit later on and that, to be honest.

As previously discussed, Asif, 17, was not in a relationship with the expectant mother and had very limited contact with her after an argument, as he explained:

I was speaking to her for like the first week or two after she told me she was pregnant and she tried being a bit rude to me and I took her number off my [phone list] and ain't spoken to her since.

There was then some confusion over when they'd last been in contact, with Asif saying he got a staff member to arrange a call, "like once a month to speak to her ask her how the pregnancy's going,

when's it due..." then claiming he'd had no contact with her for, "like two months". It was difficult to assess whether there had been much contact at all. Despite this, Asif was adamant he would have no issues seeing his child after his release, "Obviously when I'm out I'm gonna, I'm gonna have full access to my kid but no access with her". Which shows an apparent naivety of the law and assumptions that he would have some rights as an unmarried father. See [7.6 The Law](#) for more information. Also note Asif's use of the term 'access'. Prior to the Children Act 1989 this term was used to describe a parent's contact with their children. The Act introduced the term 'contact' yet the term 'access' is still in circulation as noted here in Asif's interview.

Mo, 18, spoke to his pregnant partner frequently and felt that he was involved with the pregnancy and knew what was going on.

I speak to her on the phone every day. I write her letters, she writes me letters, she sends me pictures of the baby scan, pictures of her bump and all that, yeah, so I'm quite involved already yeah.

Seth, 19, was waiting for the birth of his second baby but was less concerned about that pregnancy than the situation with his first baby, who'd been born to a different mother. He was unable to see his first baby, a son, as the child's grandfather was refusing to bring him in to prison to visit and the mother was not yet 18 and was under the supervision of her parents. When asked about the second pregnancy Seth gave very short answers and did not go into detail. Any further probing resulted in his answers becoming even terser, so I made the decision not to continue with this avenue of questioning and moved on to the next set of questions. However, his answers did show his main concern appeared to be about contact with his first son, and he was very wary about Social Services, asking me at one point, "Oh miss this [the interview] won't got to Social Services and shit though will it?" Therefore, it was difficult to analyse how he felt about the second pregnancy, as he did not talk about it in any detail, as the example below highlights.

So, tell me a bit about second baby, is that, is that with a girlfriend, is she your girlfriend, are you still together with mum?

Yeah, yeah.

Do you know if it's a boy or a girl?

Yeah. Boy.

Another boy, OK... and have you seen scans?

Yeah, I got pictures and that so, yeah.

And does she come in to see you?

Yeah. Every week she comes.

Is there a baby bump and stuff?

Big yeah. Yeah.

So you think that'll be a different [situation to his first child]...

Oh yeah, it will.

The research data suggests that for some of the expectant dads there appeared to be a genuine interest in and acknowledgement of their partners' pregnancies. The exceptions to this were Asif, 17, and Lester, 20, who did not have good relationships with the pregnant women. As explained previously, it was also difficult to ascertain how Seth, 19, felt about the second pregnancy. However, Mo, 18, Dan, 21, and Jamil, 17, appeared to be particularly well informed and were willing to discuss the pregnancies at length and acknowledge concern for their partners. Note that Mo, Dan, and Jamil were all in relationships with the women who were pregnant with their children, while Asif and Lester were not. This highlights the importance of relationships with the child's mother when it comes to involvement and engagement. This will be examined further in [6.3 Getting on with mum.](#)

4.6 LOOKING AFTER BABY

“When the second [baby] come then I always wanted to feed her and I always wanted to get up for her in the night and I wanted to do everything for her like, you know what I mean?” Simon, 20

This section of the analysis chapter examines the young men’s experiences of looking after the basic physical needs of their children. I have taken the terminology for basic physical needs from Christine Cooper’s work on adoption and fostering in the 1980s, in which she defined a checklist of child needs still used among practitioners of childcare today. The first element of this checklist defines basic physical care as, “warmth, shelter, adequate food and rest, grooming (hygiene) and protection from danger” (Cooper, 1985). The purpose of asking questions about involvement in this physical care aspect of parenting was to continue to build on the answers the fathers had given around their experiences of pregnancy and birth and to keep developing the picture of how they saw themselves as fathers. I was particularly interested to note whether there were any anomalies between the young father’s discussions of pregnancy and birth and the reality of caring for a baby. Would, for example, any of the fathers who had enthused about the birth, be unwilling to provide basic care for their child? Would the modern, caring, hands on father trope still be present when the child was born?

Of the 11 men who were already fathers, nine had spent some time with their children before starting their prison sentences. Thomas, 21, and Christopher, 21, had not yet met their children so questions regarding the basic needs of their children were similar to those asked of the expectant dads, for example, thoughts on how they would partake in practical tasks in the future. For most of the nine fathers who had spent time with their children before prison, their involvement had included the basic physical care needs of the child, from bathing and feeding, to changing nappies. While a couple of the interviewees admitted that nappy changing was not for them, the research data suggests this was a group of young men who could be described as ‘hands on’, caring fathers. This coheres with

research from the USA that showed, “many young, disadvantaged fathers are involved in the early care of their children”, (Gavin, et al., 2002, p. 273). It also aligns with the dominant construct of fathers as nurturers that developed from the 1980s onwards, as discussed in [2.6 Problem dads](#). While it could be argued that when asked questions about caring for their children the young men gave rote answers that they imagined were expected of them due to social desirability bias, (Lavrakas, 2008; Grimm, 2010; Krumpal, 2013) I found their answers to be clear and detailed. Indeed, some of them went into great detail about feeding and sleep patterns, suggesting they had practiced these parenting skills rather than just knowing what to say.

Some of the young men admitted to being scared about caring for their babies, concerned that they did not know what to do, or were worried about hurting them or getting things wrong. Kamil, 21, was particularly nervous about looking after his daughter when she was first born:

The little baby... I was afraid of holding her when she was first born, because she was so fragile and precious. I, I'm not too heavy handed but I can be, but 'cos she was so little I didn't really want to hold her.

You're scared, because you think you're going to break them don't you? Or drop them or something like that, yeah?

They're just so fragile and they can wriggle. But like, it's just, main things are, it's like, how can I say, when you're holding them you support their neck. Just little things that you pick up on.

Simon, 20, was also nervous of baby care when his first daughter was born:

Yeah like, I didn't even wanna pick like... it felt like, I didn't know how to pick her up like, like, it was everything like, winding her and just... it was unreal.

While Jordan, 21, found the whole experience of baby care overwhelming and had given up changing nappies after being embarrassed in the maternity ward, “I tried doing it I just looked, it's stupid like, in

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the whole ward everyone watching me try do it and I just couldn't do it, I was, I just give up". He was later told to practice with a doll, which he attempted, but this approach didn't work for him either:

They said get a doll and practice, but I'm like it ain't the same, because they don't wriggle, and obviously when she was bigger it was a lot harder, and, I managed to dress it but I just couldn't change nappies. I'd put it on her but it would be baggy, so I was like, nah you can do it.

Jordan's experience aligns with some young men's experience of feeling marginalised and unsupported by the maternity system (Royal College of Midwives, 2011).

Although Jonny, 18, had not been living with his son before coming into prison, he had spent time looking after the baby on his own:

Well yeah, I seen him every couple of days maybe like, three or four times a week... And I used to have him on weekends as well. So, I had him from like Friday 'til Monday.

And um what did you used to do with him then?

Do anything like, play with him, reading, watch films and that with him.

Did you change nappies and stuff like that?

Yeah, that was the worst bit!

It's the worst bit is it?

That's the worst bit. I dunno just it had to be done.

Although Lester, 20, no longer had contact with his son, he had spent some time with him before he came to jail:

Yeah, well I was, well she brought him around my flat and like I would spend a couple of hours with him, you know what I mean, feeding him, you know what I'm saying, making him laugh and stuff like that you know what I'm saying?

Change nappies?

Change nappies. I been there so, and stuff like that, giving him a bath and you know what I mean like. That's, that's the little way to bond with them ain't it really you know what I'm saying so, yeah, that's was, that was the little things I was doing. Yeah, so.

Scott, 18, had not spent much time with his son before he'd been sent to prison, but had still managed to undertake some practical parenting duties, "I changed his nappies, bathed him and stuff. That was alright, but... yeah". While Seth, 19, described nappy changing as: "Dirty innit. But I'll do it". Jake, 20, who was 15 when his son was born, admitted he had been a little more hands-off:

Did you do all the good things like changing nappies and...?

Oh no, I can't, I can't hold my hands up to that!

I was interested to know how these young men knew about these basic parenting skills. Probing in this area unveiled that the participants felt while these skills may not be innate, they could be learned and there were several avenues to that learning. Most notably a significant amount of them already had experience of parenting by looking after younger siblings, particularly around practical matters such as baby care, changing nappies, feeding, and babysitting. For example, Jake, 20, who talked about being very young to have a child at 15, already had some experience with children looking after his two younger sisters:

Did you learn anything from looking after your, your little sisters?

Yeah, I think you do learn things you just don't realise it.

And Jamil, 17, who thought he would have had children later in life, also had experience looking after his younger sister:

So do you think you'll be changing nappies and feeding?

Course, I do it for my little sister innit.

Christopher, 21, had also looked after a younger sibling:

Well I used to have a little sister and I, d'you know what I mean, so I've looked after her a lot. I used to do everything with her.

So, would that be practical things as well like...

Yeah, everything.

Changing nappies?

Yeah, I've done everything, everything.

Kamil, 21, had also learnt some parenting skills, "from looking after my brother and sister" as had Jordan, 21, who had spent time caring for his younger sister, "looking after her, staying in the house, cooking food for her, picking her up from school, taking her to school sometimes".

This makes for some intriguing contradictions. Jordan, for example, struggled with the practical elements of caring for his own daughter, yet reeled off a string of activities he frequently undertook with his sister. Christopher had talked about the pressure of becoming a father at 21 yet had spent a lot of time looking after his younger siblings. Equally Kamil, 21, who expressed several times that he was very young to be a father had spent a lot of his youth looking after his two younger siblings, and never once claimed that he had been very young to do that. This suggests these young men felt a difference between fatherhood – the act of fathering a child – and fathering, or parenting – the process of caring for and bringing up a child.

For some, the act of caring for siblings or other family members was not seen as unusual. This coheres with research that shows that many young people will, “will engage in adult-like roles and responsibilities as they transition into emerging and young adulthood”, (Hooper, 2011, citing Arnett, 2004) and that this is a seemingly normal part of growing up. However, several of the participants spent a significant period of their own childhood looking after younger siblings, most notably Jonny, 18, in what could be described as a “developmentally inappropriate caregiving role”, more commonly known as ‘parentification’ (Hooper, 2011; see also, Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973; Minuchin, 1974). The eldest of 11 boys, Jonny had spent much of his childhood caring for his siblings both physically and emotionally, as his father was in and out of prison and his mother suffered with mental illness.

When you were looking after your brothers, how did you learn what to do? Did you just make it up or did anyone tell you or your mum wasn’t around?

I just... my mum was around and she, she used to do as much as she could but um, like my mum went through a bit of damage, she was depressed and she was suffering and that so I took over and then, I was trying to do the best I could to feed ‘em, make sure they had money to go to school with and that.

Yeah. That’s a big, big responsibility for you. Did you feel like you were their dad?

A bit yeah.

As well as learning from looking after siblings, some of the other young men had learnt basic care skills from their own mothers. These included Jake, 20, whose mum had brought up him and his two sisters; Simon, 20, who said his mum was, “about a lot”, and Scott, 18, who said of his mum, “she kinda helped me a little bit to understand it all properly. Yeah. She was quite helpful”. I discuss the participants’ relationships with their own parents in [6.6 The child’s grandparents](#).

Other avenues of acquiring these basic skills including learning by themselves or picking up skills as they went along, for example, Scott, 18, said he'd learnt how to do things by himself:

Who taught you how to change a nappy?

Me.

You? You just learned?

Me. Yeah, because it's just one of those things.

While Kamil, 21, had found a very different way of learning basic parenting skills, "Yeah. I learnt from just watching, watching others. Like, say you watch a film, you see stuff there you pick it up". But also revealed a lot of learning was 'trial and error':

No, not really, just, it's like I said, trial and error. It's er, learning the basics, and mainly, obviously we, we, stress out about certain stuff that we get wrong, like I say making bottles, getting, counting the scoops, getting one scoop too wrong, or maybe putting in for the microwave or warming the bottle up from the kettle and then cooling it down, it's, a lot of things you just learn from.

I also asked the expectant fathers and the fathers who had not yet met their children how they would know what to do when their babies arrived. Dan, 21, was sure his mum and dad would give him, "all the tips" and that his girlfriend would be researching how to do everything. Jamil, 17, was confident he would learn parenting skills quickly but may need some help with feeding the baby:

To be honest, I'm a visual learner, so if I was to see you do something it might take me one or two times to get it right but I'd learn by watching you. So I seen my mum do it, she's got three little children now, seen her do it numerous times. The only bad thing that I might be a bit bad at is making a bottle, just mixing it and whatnot.

While Asif, 17, felt he'd know what to do through experience with his nieces and nephews:

'Cos I got the older nieces and nephews, I got like my sister just had another son so she got three sons so I got three nephews, and four nieces, so, I'm always looking after, when I was on the out, always looking after them, always over my sister's looking after them, can't, I know, I know.

Christopher, 21, who had not yet met his child, was not too concerned about knowing what to do if and when they finally did meet as he'd learnt a lot from his mum and grandmothers:

My mum... My nan and gran, my grandma, she's amazing, she's just like, ah, do this, this, and this, and teach me like little things and...

Thomas, 21, was not at all fazed about undertaking basic physical tasks, telling me, "I can change baby's arse", having been in a previous relationship with a woman and a baby:

I know that I'm capable of being a father because I was. For like nine weeks. So I know I'm capable of doing it because I've done it.

Note here how Thomas equates nine weeks of looking after a baby as being capable of being a father.

Only one interviewee, Simon, 20, talking about parenting skills as something that came naturally, as he explained:

...you kind of pick it up naturally as well don't you because it, because they're yours and they're the most precious thing to you, you pick it up, naturally like.

Incidentally, Simon was the only participant who had taken a parenting skills course. He had completed a 'young dad's' course, which had been organised through his youth offending team after a previous conviction. As he explains:

It was like um, like, burping, like winding the baby.

Ah, yeah sort of practical stuff.

Yeah it was things like that I already knew and you got a doll and they like showed you how to do it like ... stuff, stuff I already knew really.

However, from Simon's answer you can surmise that the course had not taught him anything he didn't know. This potentially contradicts research from Buston et al., (2012) that found parenting classes in prison were generally well received and found to be useful. There is, I suggest, potential for more research in this area.

The general idea that fathering skills are not inherent and can be learnt aligns with prior research. For example, in his examination of men taking part in a male-only parenting programme, Dolan found that many of the participants believed that, as men, they had a "lack of knowledge" about parenting and that their wives and partners "instinctively" knew what to do (Dolan, 2013, p. 8). While these young men appeared to embrace the caring and nurturing side of parenting, thereby dismantling some of the gendering of parenthood, they did appear to believe that, for them, parenting was not instinctive. This reinforces prior discourse that suggests fatherhood is not instinctive, but motherhood is (Dolan, 2013). Nevertheless, the research suggests that these young fathers had not balked at caring for their children and providing them with the basic physical needs, even if they believed they needed to learn the skills in order to do this.

Naturally, one of the limitations of this research is that the young fathers' answers could not be verified, and I did not speak to the mothers of their children, who could have told me a very different story. See [3.10 Limitations of the research](#) for more information. An interviewee who told me he'd changed nappies may only have done it once, or indeed may only have thought about doing it.

However, the fact that the majority of the young men talked about practical parenting, and that when probed they appeared to know more than just the top-line facts about activities such as changing nappies or preparing bottles, suggests I can assume their discussion about involvement in baby care was largely truthful and gave insights into their views of fatherhood.

4.7 CONCLUSION TO THIS CHAPTER

“When I holded (sic) her I started crying, when I first holded her, I know, I’ve made something into this world, so I was happy like”, Jordan, 21

Little is known about young fathers’ experiences of pregnancy (Finnbogadóttir, Svalenius & Persson, 2003; Buston, 2010; Gage & Kirk, 2016), yet for these young men, finding out about the pregnancy was the starting point of their journey to becoming a father. The majority of participants, whether fathers or fathers to be, appeared to be involved and engaged with the pregnancy. While these pregnancies were unplanned, my interpretation of the interview data was that the resulting children were not unwanted, and, after an initial period of shock, becoming a father was a positive experience. Many of the interviewees did not expect to be fathers at a young age, which coheres with other research (Speake, Cameron & Gilroy, 1997) and, for some, there appeared to be a lack of agency in acknowledging the pregnancy, almost as if they had had no part in it. For example, Lester, 21, used the phrase “she end up pregnant” when discussing his ex-partner, and Christopher, 21, talked about “being put in this situation” when he’d found out he was to become a dad. This could be interpreted as an inability to take responsibility for their actions, but I believe it could also be interpreted as a sign that these young men felt helpless.

Nearly all the participants attended the birth of the child or children. Those that did not attend either didn’t know about it (Lester, 20), or were in prison at the time (Christopher, 21, Thomas, 21).

Attending the birth appeared to be very important to these young men, and those that did not attend, or would not be able to attend forthcoming births, felt that absence keenly. Many of the young men also discussed taking part in childcare duties, such as changing nappies and feeding. Some already had experience of childcare from looking after younger siblings, particular Jonny, 18, who was the eldest of 10 brothers and had, at times, been a primary carer for all his siblings.

My interpretation of the interview data was that becoming a dad was a powerful emotional experience for these young men. Yet there appears to be little help and support for those who find themselves in this situation. I would suggest there is scope to revisit the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy but not simply to reduce unplanned pregnancy numbers further. An emphasis on the challenges of raising a child, rather than just contraceptive advice, could increase a sense of responsibility among young parents, so that if they do make the choice to have children, they are fully prepared. I would also suggest that increasing the support available for young men who do find themselves becoming fathers would be a suitable use of resources. This could include increasing education around parenting skills and the reality of caring for a child. There could also be an increased focus on young fathers in ante-natal care and within the maternity system. Actively communicating with young men who find themselves fathers and supporting them rather than concentrating solely on trying to ensure no teen or young pregnancies take place, could provide better outcomes for those who are already fathers.

It could also be said that concentrating on some of the positives of young fatherhood would help to reduce the censure and sense of marginalisation these young men feel. There is data to suggest that becoming a father can be a turning point in a young man's life. More evidence of this would be welcome. While contact with their children while in prison is discussed in [Chapter 7: Limiting fatherhood](#), it might also prove useful to examine how expectant fathers can be allowed to attend births, perhaps revisiting the rules around ROTL and actively specifying attending a birth as a reason for allowing ROTL (Ministry of Justice, 2020a). Naturally, this must all be caveated with the responsibility of all agencies to ensure the safety of the child is paramount as well as always ensuring the safety of the mother.

It is clear that the participants' experiences of becoming a father have helped to shape their perceptions of fatherhood. Many of the young men talked about the strong emotions they felt when hearing they were to be fathers. This emotional response suggests they had internalised the

nurturant father model, characterised by their seeming willingness to attend the birth and to undertake childcare duties. In the following chapter I analyse the interviewees' responses to specific questions about what a 'good dad' is and examine whether these responses reflect the emotions outlined in this chapter.

CHAPTER 5: BEING A GOOD DAD

5.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the research aims was to determine what perceptions the young men had of fatherhood and, whether these differed from the dominant constructs of fathers discussed in [Chapter 2: Literature review](#). I was also curious to discover whether the interviewees' perceptions of fatherhood were as complex and diverse as the research suggests (Lewis, 2000; Dermot, 2003; Mormon & Floyd, 2006; Meah & Jackson, 2016). Or perhaps their individual perceptions would cohere into one distinct definition of fatherhood. I was interested to find out if they would refer, either explicitly, or by inference, to traditional models of fatherhood, such as the breadwinner model, whether they would veer more towards the modern, hands-on father, or whether they had constructed their own models of fatherhood. To this end I included two questions within the interview framework that I believed would prompt discussions about their perceptions of fatherhood, these were:

- What do you think makes a good dad?
- What do you think the responsibilities of being a dad are?

After the first day of interviews, I decided to add the questions 'how would you like your child to think of you as a dad' and 'what type of dad do you think you'll be in the future' to my questions list. The intention was to get the interviewees to think outside of their experiences thus far, and to imagine themselves as future fathers. I surmised that asking about their future hopes as a father would elicit

ideas about being a good dad. I felt it unlikely that their hopes for the future would include being a 'bad dad'.

My intention in asking these questions was not to discover what they thought of themselves as fathers, or their views on their own fathers. The intention was more to find out what they thought being a good father meant outside of their own lived experiences. My initial thoughts were that I could then use their perceptions of fatherhood as a comparison with how they viewed themselves as fathers, or how they had been fathered. This turned out to be a rather naïve assumption. As the interviews progressed, I noted that some of the participants tended to qualify their initial answers with a comment about themselves and their experiences of being a father. In addition, some of the men qualified their initial answer with observations about their own fathers, while some used examples from both themselves as fathers and their experiences of their own fathers. This suggests a subjective approach to perceptions of fatherhood, where their ideals were formed experientially, from their own experiences of being a father, or being fathered. In other words, their perceptions and their experiences of fatherhood were one and the same.

I found that the initial answer given to the question 'what do you think makes a good dad' was often predicated on their relationship with their own father. For some interviewees their views on fatherhood had been positively influenced by how they interacted with their own fathers. Others talked about 'righting the wrongs' of their fathers and expressed a desire to do things differently with their own children. I wished to examine further how the interviewees were using their own fathers as the basis of their perceptions of a good dad. So, I looked at each initial answer to the question 'what do you think makes a good dad' and noted it against how they had described their relationship with their own father. Four of the men described having a good relationship with their father and said their parents were still in a relationship so they had been brought up by both parents. Three of the men described having a good relationship with their father although their parents were no longer in a relationship, and they had been brought up either by their mother or their father or a combination of

both parents. Eight of the men described having a poor or no relationship at all with their father. Seven of these men had been brought up for the majority of their childhoods solely by their mothers; only one, Scott, 18, had spent time with both his mother and his father – who were separated – while he was growing up. The table below maps the interviewees’ relationship with their father with their initial responses to the question ‘what do you think makes a good dad’.

TABLE 4: PARTICIPANTS’ RELATIONSHIP WITH FATHER

Interviewee	Relationship with father	Initial answer to ‘what do you think makes a good dad’?
Seth, 19	Good relationship with father and parents still in a relationship	“Not coming into here [prison]”
Ryan, 21		“Being there”
Simon, 20		“A good dad is being there”
Jake, 20		“Everyone’s different”
Jordan, 21	Good relationship with father but parents separated	“Being there, supporting [them]”
Dan, 21		“Someone who’s always there for their kids”
Christopher, 21		“Being there”
Thomas, 21	Absent father/poor or no relationship	“Someone that’s there for their child”
Asif, 17		“Always being there”
Jamil, 17		“Being there”
Lester, 20		“Being a good dad takes a lot”
Scott, 18		“Someone who is there for their child”
Jonny, 18		“No one’s really a good dad”
Mo, 18		“Puts their kids before anyone else”
Kamil, 21		Could not answer

Note that the dominant answer to what makes a good dad was 'being there' or variations of that phrase, with nine of the 15 interviewees initially answering in that way. My analysis of what this answer may mean is examined in more detail in [5.3 Being there](#). Five participants who answered 'being there' described having good or strong relationships with their own fathers, even if their parents were no longer in a relationship. Of the eight who had not grown up with their biological father, or who had a poor or no relationship with their father, four of the interviewees said being a good dad was 'being there'. The remaining four had differing answers to the question and one, Kamil, could not directly answer the question at all. It could be argued that those interviewees who had little or no relationship with their own fathers had more disparate ideas about what being a good dad meant, and three of the answers were somewhat negative, i.e., it "takes a lot" and "no one's really a good dad", or no answer at all. The participants' relationships with their own fathers are arguably a guiding factor in their overall perceptions of fatherhood. See [5.6 Being a son](#) for further discussion.

5.2 INTERLINKING QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

I had decided to ask not only what the interviewees thought a good dad was, but also what they thought the responsibilities of being a good dad were. I asked these two separate questions because I had expected to receive separate answers. My assumption was that answers to the 'good dad' question would be about their general attitude to fatherhood, while the 'responsibilities' question would provoke answers about legal and economic matters, such as providing food and security, or discipline and support. However, as the interviews progressed, I realised I was not receiving distinct answers to both questions and that, for most of the interviewees, the two questions were in fact very similar, if not indistinguishable. This did cause some confusion in a number of interviews, when interviewees repeated the answer they had given to the 'good dad' question to the 'responsibilities' question. My interpretation of this was that the participants viewed being a good dad and responsibilities as one and the same, i.e., that if they fulfilled their responsibilities that would

constitute being a good dad. Despite receiving the same or very similar answers to both questions I decided to keep and ask them both to see if any of the interviewees did answer them differently.

During analysis of the data, I realised that the answers I received to the questions about how they would like to be perceived by their children in the future were linked with the 'good dad' and 'responsibilities' questions. All the participants I asked about the future appeared to assume they would be or wanted to be seen as good dads. The assumption that they would be good dads is not uncommon among young fathers as research examined in the literature review suggested (see Bushfield, 2004). While answers to these questions produced few contrasts between the general perceptions of fatherhood and how they perceived themselves as fathers, they did bring some insights. The resulting sections of this chapter thus sees considerable crossover in answers to all questions and I have only separated out the questions when the answers were noticeably different. One of the dominant themes that emerged from the interviews was that the young men felt being a good dad was 'being there'. This theme is examined in the next section of this chapter.

5.3 BEING THERE

"I think being a good dad is being there for it, that's the main thing, being there for it," Jamil, 17

As discussed in [5.1 Introduction](#), for nine of the 15 young men being a good dad meant 'being there' or variations on that phrase. The concept of 'being there' is often cited as an aspiration for young fathers (Bunting & McAuley, 2004, p. 299; Speake, 2006; Osborn, 2007; Clayton, 2016, p. 132) and, it could be argued, for fathers in general (Mormon & Floyd, 2006). It has been described as being available both physically and emotionally for a child, in other words, spending quality time with a child, talking, and listening to them, offering support and guidance and emotional comfort (Mormon & Floyd, 2006; Neale & Lau Clayton, 2011). Indeed, descriptions of 'being there' resonate with the

construct of the new or modern father. For those participants who cited 'being there' as a key element of being a good dad, I was keen to probe into what they believed it meant. This was particularly as this cohort could not always physically be there for their children as they were in prison, and those participants who did not have contact with their children could not be there emotionally for them either.

Father of two Simon, 20, was cognisant of the fact he couldn't always be there physically for his children, although they did visit him regularly, but was looking to the future when he could be both physically and emotionally available:

I think, I think a good dad is being there like, like I know I'm like saying that to be there and I'm in prison, so it's a bit hypocritical but like when I'm out there I'm constantly with them, I'll be there every day, um, just, just being there and just, helping with everything like, know what I mean? Just trying my best. But I'd say, I'd say I'm a good dad when I'm out there, just I made one stupid mistake and I'm in here like.

Note here how Simon also articulates the 'trying my best' narrative, which is another aspect of fathering often cited by young fathers (Shirani, 2015; Clayton, 2016) and will be discussed further in [5.4 Alternatives to being there](#). For Simon, being there meant taking on a caring role, performing tasks and executing day to day activities. Note how he uses the term 'helping', which suggests that his role in the parenting would be secondary to that of his partner, as he would be helping with tasks rather than leading them. This could be interpreted that Simon believed the father takes a secondary role in the parenting partnership.

Expectant dad Asif, 17, also talked about being there as an important aspect of being a good dad, saying:

Well. Just always being, always being there, give, give my son whatever, whatever he need and whatever, whatever he wants, so, always be there for him and obviously never let him down.

Clearly this answer was predicated on Asif's own upbringing as he qualified his response with the following, "I was thinking my dad weren't there for me so, I'm, I'm gonna make sure that I'm there for my son". My interpretation of Asif's answers was that he was using the negative experience of his own father not being there to shape his perceptions of a good dad and his aspirations for his own behaviour as a father. For Asif, being there meant simply to be present and not letting his child down. Note also that Asif talks about not only giving his child "whatever he need" but also "whatever he wants". Need suggests affinity with the caring role, while want suggests an affinity with the idea of the breadwinner model.

Father of one Thomas, 21, also cited being there as part of being a good dad, but qualified this by talking about how consistency was important in parenting:

[A good dad is] someone that's there for their child and provides for them. Someone that's not in and out of their life, someone that's consistent with their parenting, um, to be honest someone who's a role model.

Note also that Thomas talks about providing for a child as well and of being a 'role model', showing a mix of both old and new models of fatherhood. Thomas had a complex relationship with his ex-partner and did not currently have contact with his daughter. He said he had been told by Social Services that he would have to show a level of commitment to good behaviour once leaving prison in order to gain contact with his daughter and that it would not be good for her if he was "in and out" of prison. This is potentially confusing as Thomas had been to court to get his name on the birth certificate and gain parental responsibility for his daughter, so it is unclear what Social Services meant by this. However, Thomas' choice of words like 'consistent' and 'not in and out of their life' when

describing a good dad suggests he was reflecting what he had been told by Social Services. Equally, Thomas' relationship with his own father was complex. He had been present in Thomas' life until he was around 10 or 11-years-old, then had been sent to prison when Thomas was 15, leaving him to look after himself, as he explained:

I don't really look to my parents for like attention or money, or anything financial, I support myself like, I'm independent. I've lived on my own since I was like 15. So, I don't really rely on my parents at all so, so I'd just like them to be there innit.

Note how on the one hand Thomas proudly admits to having been independent since he was 15, yet on the other hand says he'd like his parents to "be there". My interpretation of his answers is that his idea that a good dad is someone who's there for their child reflects his own negative experiences and also his desire that his parents had been there for him. Here Thomas has used his experience of fathering and of being fathered to shape his perceptions of fatherhood.

Other participants who said 'being there' as their initial answer to the question 'what do you think makes a good dad' included Ryan, Jordan, Dan, and Christopher, all 21, and Jamil, 17. As aforementioned, this is not uncommon, particularly among young fathers (Bunting & McAuley, 2004, p. 299; Speake, 2006; Osbourne, 2007; Clayton, 2016, p. 132). I would suggest that those participants who gave different answers to the question offer further insight into this cohort's perceptions of fatherhood, which is examined in the following section.

5.4 ALTERNATIVES TO BEING THERE

"Yeah, so just trying to be, be as good as I can for my boy", Jonny, 20

While nine of the 15 men cited 'being there' as their initial answer to the question 'what is a good dad', those whose answers fell outside this narrative provide an alternative view. For example, Kamil,

21, struggled to think of an answer when asked what he thought being a good dad meant. Having been brought up without his biological father – nor did he mention any other male influences within the home – it could be argued that Kamil had no understanding of or experience of male role models. Therefore it is unsurprising that Kamil struggled to articulate what good fathering meant to him. Yet he couldn't think of any 'good dads' outside of his sphere of experience either. Now in a stable relationship with his partner and a stepdad to her daughter and father to his own daughter, Kamil told me his partner had said he was a 'good dad' so I asked why he thought she might have said that. My hope was that this may help him to describe how his behaviour or actions defined a good dad, but he couldn't grasp why his partner had awarded him this compliment, saying:

I don't see myself as a good dad, I see myself as a learning dad. Which, how can I say it, I see myself as time will progress as it goes to be a good dad.

Despite being told he was a good father and stepfather by his partner, Kamil did not acknowledge this himself, consistently saying he found being a father "really hard", and "a big step for me in life" and "a big change". This suggests Kamil did not have any specific perceptions of fatherhood but that his own experiences showed that being a good dad was not something that came naturally but amounted to a series of difficult tasks that needed to be learnt and practiced. I also asked Kamil if he could think of anyone he knew personally who was a good dad, or perhaps even someone in the media:

Can you think of anyone like that?

[Long pause] Not really.

Not really. No?

Because I never had a dad.

Did you not?

No, I never had a dad. It was just mum, and mum was on the offside. With drugs. Um, so I went and lived with my nan.

It could be argued that Kamil's inability to define a good father was linked to the fact he'd "never had a dad". Obviously, he did have a biological father, but he had never experienced being fathered, as such. However, other interviewees had not had a father present in their lives, biological or otherwise, yet they had provided views on what they thought a good dad was, most usually the opposite of their own fathers. It was intriguing that Kamil could not think of anyone else who he thought was a good dad, even a media figure, particularly as earlier in his interview he had revealed that he learnt some parenting skills from movies, as he explained: "Yeah. I learnt from just watching, watching others. Like, say you watch a film, you see stuff there you pick it up". In addition, later in the interview Kamil said his partner's father was "... a very good dad, he's a good dad to my partner", and "an amazing grandpa", showing he understood what a good dad meant for his partner and her children. It could be argued that Kamil did recognise a good dad and understand what being a good dad meant, but not when it applied to himself, both as a father and as a son.

While Kamil was the only interviewee who could not directly answer the question of what being a good father meant, he was, in my opinion, one of the most tender when talking about his daughters, both step and biological. When discussing his stepdaughter he revealed that he used to read her a bedtime story every night and that, "she don't call me dad she calls me Kamil, which I'm happy for that but she takes to me like I'm her dad". He also revealed that that summer he'd received four Father's Day cards, including one from his stepdaughter which she had drawn herself, "yeah, [with] stick, stick ladies, and her, and the baby, and she joins all their hands together, which is pretty cute". Kamil became particularly emotional when talking about his six-month-old daughter, telling me, "She's adorable, she's just started to um eat squirty food" and that, "I was afraid of holding her when she was first born, because she was so fragile and precious". He also told me with delight that the last

time she had visited with his partner and stepdaughter she had had a “fountain” on her head, “A fountain you know, like a little bun?”

It was clear from his answers that Kamil was delighted about being a father and adored his daughters, yet he appeared to have little confidence in his skills as a father and thought of fatherhood as a series of tasks. The following exchange, in which Kamil talks about practical tasks when asked about the responsibilities of fatherhood, supports the assumption that he saw being a dad as a skillset that could be learned rather than something that came naturally.

So, if you, if you had to say what the responsibilities of being a dad [are].

Responsibilities... [Pause]

So, say somebody was about to become a dad, what would you say to them, like these, these are the really important things you've gotta be. What would you say?

Really important things. Like to me, the really important things is being wealthy for them, making them wealthy, like, like as in, being healthy, being fed, being, being winded...

Yeah. So, like looking after them? Making sure they're happy?

Yeah, looking after them, making sure they're happy, a lot of bondage [participant's choice of word] but not too much bondage because then they look for that, that comfort always and they're crying but mainly to be a good dad for the first time I'd say, just be yourself. Just be yourself and don't panic too much 'cos, me? I was scared of holding her.

I was intrigued by the use of the term ‘wealthy’ in Kamil’s answers. Although I did not probe why he used that particular word I interpreted that he did not necessarily mean being wealthy in the traditional sense, that is having a lot of money. It could be that he was using the term to express being emotionally and physically available to his daughters, although that is just my assumption. Note also how Kamil says to be a good dad you should “just be yourself” even though his other answers

suggested he felt being himself was not quite enough to be called a good dad. This further supports Kamil's confusion over what it means to be a good dad.

Although Scott, 18, had been one of the nine who answered 'being there' when questioned about what a good dad was, he also discussed support and guidance. The remainder of his interview also provoked answers that showed how his perceptions of fatherhood were linked with his experiences with his own father. Scott had been 16 when his son, now 18 months old, was born, making him one of the youngest to become a father. He had been at the birth and had some initial contact with the child and his mother, however now Scott only had indirect contact with his son through Social Services and had not seen him since he'd come to prison. He had been in prison for 15 months and had nine months left on his sentence. He would have to fulfill certain criteria with Social Services before being allowed contact with his son when he left prison, more details of which will be discussed in further detail in [7.5 The Social](#).

Scott had been reticent in his answers during the beginning of the interview and had appeared to me to be very nervous. As the interview progressed Scott began to relax and started to talk more openly when I asked him what he thought a good dad was, saying, "Somebody who is there for their child, and can offer them support when they need it the most". Although Scott could not think of anyone he thought was a good dad, even someone in the media, he continued on the theme of support when I asked him what the responsibilities of being a dad were, leading him to talk about his experiences with his own father:

And what do you think the responsibilities of being a dad are?

Oh, to look after your child. Children, um. I don't know really. That's what the responsibilities really are innit? Just be there for them when they need you, give them guidance and support and stuff.

So that's interesting. What kind of guidance would you want to give?

So, like, thing is with me, my, my father didn't give me the right guidance, so I took the wrong paths in life. For my child I would want them to go in the right way.

This suggests Scott felt that his father's lack of guidance and support had contributed to the decisions and actions he had made, which had, in Scott's experiences, ended in prison. Like Kamil, Scott's views of fatherhood were based on his experiences with his own father, though whereas Kamil had little idea what a good father might be because his own father had been absent, Scott had a clear idea what a good father should be and that was the opposite of his own father. He felt he had not been supported by his father, or received appropriate guidance from him, and therefore he wanted to do things differently with his own child.

Scott was also not keen for his son to see his father, which was unusual among the interviewees. Many of them had strong ties with their own grandparents and found their parents invaluable in dealing with their children, which is discussed further in [Chapter 6: The importance of relationships](#). However, when I asked Scott if his own mother and father saw their grandchild he replied:

Um. Mum, every now and again. Dad's never seen him, no.

Do you mind me asking do you know why that is? Or is it just circumstances?

I just don't feel like he's... if he... I don't think he could be the positive in my son's life so... I'd let my son make that decision when he's a little bit older.

I then asked Scott what kind of dad he thought he might be to his son in the future and he clearly stated that he wanted to be a different sort of father to his own:

What kind of dad do you think you'll be as he's growing up?

Well I'd want to be a supportive dad. And I'd want the best for him, like, I would want to be the dad that my dad was never, to me.

This reinforces the idea that Scott's perceptions of fatherhood had been shaped by his experiences with his own father and that his desire was to turn his father's negative parenting into a positive through his own behaviour. Also note how he was allowing his own son to make the decision about seeing his grandfather when he was old enough. Could it be that Scott was not allowed to make his own decisions about seeing his father?

Scott was one of the few interviewees who had received some form of parenting support while in prison, so I was keen to see whether any of this support had helped to shape his perceptions of fatherhood. Prior to being in the prison where I interviewed him, Scott had spent time in a secure care home before being transferred to a young offender institute at 17, then into an adult prison at 18. While at the secure care home Scott had been part of a father's group with other young dads, as he explained:

We had like a father's group and we'd all like go there and chat about things and like we'd like, explain... we'd do stuff about like how to be a better dad upon release. And looking at the things that like, that like the legal teams would look at, say if we would like contact sort of things, so like when we get out we'd have to work towards all of that, so they was helping us with that and erm, they used... for like Christmas and that, um we used to get together and then we'd just wrap up the presents for our kids and stuff, so...

Was that good?

It was quite good.

And when you said about kind of being a good dad. Can you remember what they, what they said?

Kind of. Like it was love, like, kindness, like supportive, like a strong person to look up to.

Scott again discussed the idea of ‘support’ as being an essential part of being a good dad, and being someone to look up to, suggesting the father’s group he had been a part of reinforced his perception that a good dad is a supportive one. Note also how this father’s group discussed practical matters such as dealing with contact and legal matters, something that some of the participants appeared to have very little understanding of. This is discussed in further detail in [7.6 The Law](#), although I raise it here as a recommendation for future work with young fathers in prison. Discussing legal matters in an informal father’s group where the men can talk about their own experiences could be beneficial to their involvement as fathers.

Jonny, 18, father to a two-year-old son, also had a different answer to ‘being there’ to the question about being a good dad, which in analysis reflected his own experiences of being a father and of being fathered. When asked the initial question he answered:

To be honest, no one, no one’s really a good dad.

Hmm?

No one’s really the best dad, they just try and be the best dad you can.

Trying to be the best dad?

Yeah. We all, we all does our mistakes and, and unfortunately it ends up here and that. But, still trying to do the best that I can.

Note how Jonny’s answer moves linguistically from a general ‘they’ trying to do the best they can, to the more personal “trying to do the best that I can”, suggesting that his perception of a good dad is someone who tries their best, and that he was using this concept in his own fathering. Arguably, this idea of trying one’s best is linked to taking responsibility as a parent. Perhaps, for Jonny, doing the best that he could meant he was taking responsibility for his role as a father. In turn, this links to the concept that “Responsibility for child care belongs to parents, not the State”, which became the

“dominant conception” from the Children Act 1989 (Eekelaar, 1991). Jonny said his father had not been around when he was growing up, and that he had been in and out of the care system as his mother had mental health issues and often couldn’t cope with the family. As Jonny’s interview continued, he revealed that as the eldest in the family he had spent a significant part of his earlier years looking after his 10 brothers, essentially taking on a parenting role:

I had 10 brothers and I’ve always had to look after them, we never had a role model...

Oh. So, you had to look after them all did you?

Yeah. I had to feed them and everything, change them and that. And that’s how I ended up in dealing drugs just to get money and helping them out.

Here Jonny talks both about the caring aspect of fathering, feeding, and changing nappies, but also about providing financially for his brothers, albeit through criminal means. This suggests a blend of both traditional and modern father roles. As discussed in [Chapter 4: Becoming a dad](#), it was not unusual for the interviewees to have performed parenting duties for younger siblings, however Jonny’s descriptions of his earlier life suggested it was particularly chaotic and he had taken on a lot of the responsibility for his siblings’ care:

I just... my mum was around and she, she used to do as much as she could but um, like my mum went through a bit of damage, she was depressed and she was suffering and that so I took over and then, I was trying to do the best I could to feed ‘em, make sure they had money to go to school with and that.

Yeah. That’s a big, big responsibility for you. Did you feel like you were their dad?

A bit yeah.

Yeah.

The needs and experience of young fathers in prison

Like... my dad was, he was in prison quite, quite a bit in his life, he only just got released from this prison... He got released two years ago.

Oh OK.

It was, it was a bit hard for us all but I used to be trying to think and try to be like a father to them. To do as much as I could, make sure they had money for feeding and that.

Here Jonny has had to think like a father and taken on fathering duties for his siblings without being their biological father. This reinforces the concept that fatherhood is not the same as fathering. Again, note the use of language when Jonny explains that he was “trying to do the best I could” to ensure his brothers had food and basic care. Clearly his earlier comments about a good dad being someone who is doing their best correlated with his own experiences. Without his own father being around – and with his mother dealing with mental health issues – he had to take on basic care duties, which he had undertaken in what he felt was the best way he could. Again, note that bringing in money to feed his siblings was an important aspect of Jonny’s ‘fathering duties’ for his siblings. This reinforces the idea that fathering requires some element of economic provisioning.

Jonny also seemed to suggest that you could not be a good dad while in prison, which perhaps reflects the fact his own father had been in and out of prison, and therefore Jonny did not believe he had been a good dad to him. For example, Jonny did not like his son visiting, saying:

I think that it's not a good place really to bring kids in here. They gotta be searched and be around dogs and that. And they must think, what the hell's going on.

He had only seen his son once in three months, preferring to talk to him by phone and to write letters, although as his son was only two-years old his responses were limited. I did not ask Jonny if he had visited his own father when he was in prison, and, in hindsight this might have offered some insight into why Jonny didn’t want his own son visiting – perhaps he had visited his father in prison and found the experience traumatic. However, without having asked this question this is just

supposition on my part. Equally, not wanting a child to visit is not uncommon among prisoners, who fear for the affect the prison environment may have on their children as discussed in the literature review, (Genisio, 1996; Clarke et al, 2005). Jonny did say that he was, “just waiting to get outside and be a better dad” and that he would, “rather wait until I’ve finished my sentence and then be the best dad I can”, suggesting being in prison was a barrier to him being a good dad and that he would have to wait until his sentence was finished.

Despite this idea that prison created a hiatus in Jonny’s ability to be a good dad, he was one of the interviewees who had spent the most time caring for his son before coming into prison. Although he was not living with the child’s mother, he had his own flat and would look after his son at the weekends, he also said that having his son was, “the best thing I done in life now”, and showed commitment and responsibility as a father before his prison sentence. This raises the question of why he felt he could not father while in prison. Jonny’s view was that he did not feel prison was a good environment to bring his child into, and that without being physically close to his son he could not be a good father. While in prison he was hindered in doing his ‘best’ by virtue of the fact he could not undertake any of the caring duties he had previously undertaken with his son. He could also not sustain any support for him financially and provide for him, whether legally or illegally.

Christopher, 21, who talked about a good dad being caring and understanding felt he would be a good dad and hoped his actions would be reflected in how his child spoke about him:

Everyone thinks I’ll be a good dad. I’ve always been good with kids... Hopefully he will be, I’m not a, I’m not a bad person. I’m, I’m nice, caring. I like having a good laugh with people so hopefully he just says oh, my dad’s a good person and we have a good laugh all of the time.

Another interviewee whose initial answer to the ‘good dad’ question elaborated on the ‘being there’ narrative was Lester, 20. His answer acknowledged that being a father was challenging, as he said:

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A good dad? Well, being a good dad takes a lot to be fair, it takes a lot, you gotta give a lot up, for just one person and at the end of the day it's worth it like, what it takes to be a dad? A lot man, like, phew, caring, loving, you, you, providing for your child in the right way, you know what I mean, um, always being there for them when they need ya, stuff like that it's, it's essential ain't it, so you gotta be there.

Although Lester did mention 'being there' as part of being a good dad his initial reaction to the question was that being a good dad was challenging. This appeared to reflect Lester's own experiences. Lester was father to one son and was expecting the birth of his second son, to a different mother. After some initial contact with his first son, he had not seen him or had any type of contact with him or the mother for the four months he'd been in prison. He was in contact with the pregnant mother but, although he expressed an interest in doing so, he had no definite plans to meet the baby when it was born. For both children, while Lester acknowledged the responsibilities of fatherhood, he seemed to feel that he could do little to rectify the contact situation until he was out of prison. Rather like Jonny it appeared that Lester felt prison was a barrier to undertaking any fathering tasks.

Admitting the situation was 'tough' he said:

I'm just holding the faith, hopefully when I get out I can, be seen to sort it out, obviously I don't want it to go to court and stuff like that you know what I mean? It's not good on him. But at the end of the day I gotta do what I gotta do as a dad, you know what I'm saying. If I wanna see my son I'm gonna go to the extra length to make sure I do see my son, you know what I mean, 'cos it's not good, him not having a dad there, 'cos I've never my dad there when I was younger, you know what I mean? And I don't want that for him. So, I'm gonna do what I can so I can get to see him, yeah?

Note how Lester moves from discussing the situation with his own son into the experiences he had when growing up without a father. His answers suggest he wants to be a part of his son's life in a way his father was not a part of his life. However, Lester felt that he would have to wait until he was out of

prison to do anything. Lester had had a chaotic upbringing; his father was absent and he had lived with a variety of his mother's friends abroad while she had come to the UK before sending for him. Lester had not seen his father for many years yet knew he had half siblings from his father's side but was not sure how many or where they were. He clearly did not want the same situation to happen to his own sons, and expressed the desire that they would help him stay on track once he left prison:

'Cos I don't wanna keep coming back [into prison] and they've not got a dad there to support them know what I'm saying and to bond and all that stuff, you know what I mean like, I didn't have that. Not at all. Didn't have one bit of that you know what I'm saying, so, I don't want them like how I grew up. I want them to grow up different, you know what I mean? Have everything they want, and stuff like that.

Note here the use of therapeutic language in Lester's answer, such as 'bond'. This could be interpreted that the idea of bonding with a child has now become part of the fathering narrative. He also talks about his children having 'everything they want', which could mean emotionally or materially.

Despite not having any concrete plans post release Lester did express a desire to see his sons and to "make them proud" of him. His assertion that being a dad was hard reflects his own experiences of being a father. He had found it tough to be a dad in prison saying, "Because I know I've got, I know I've got kids and it hurts every day, it hurts every night, you know what I mean?" In effect Lester had become stuck while in prison, unable to look into gaining contact with his first son and feeling as if he had to wait until his sentence was finished before he could start any legal processes to get contact.

The idea that parenting from prison is challenging and hard is reflected in research (Magaletta & Herbst, 2001; Arditti, Smock & Parkman, 2005; Clarke et al, 2005) and will be discussed further in [7.2 Pains of imprisonment](#). However, it is worth pointing out here where prison has been highlighted in the participants' answers to the question about good dads. For example, Jonny's answers suggest some of these young fathers felt powerless to act while they were in prison and that their fathering

was essentially 'on hold' while they were in prison. This raises questions about how these young men can be encouraged and supported to maintain and build on their relationships with their children, even while they are in prison.

Ryan, 21, also said 'being there' as his initial response to the good father question, yet he elaborated on this and further answers revealed his perceptions of being a good dad were complex and often contradictory. In my opinion they were also clearly linked to his relationship with his own father. Like many of the interviewees Ryan had a complicated family background and relationship with the partner of his three-year-old son. After some initial contact with mother and child after the birth, Ryan had been stopped from seeing his son by Social Services and there was a restraining order against him so he could not have contact with his ex-partner either. Although I did not ask for more details of the restraining order, it is likely to have been granted under Section 5 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. He had been told that he needed to go to court in order to get any form of contact with his son. Ryan clearly felt this was unfair and was, in my opinion, the most agitated of the young men I interviewed and was also the only interviewee who became outwardly emotional during his interview. When I asked Ryan what being a good dad meant to him he answered:

It's more emotional support. Being there. You know, everyone has their own ideas about being a good dad. Um, mine has always been family takes care of family.

Ryan had strong views about being a father, yet as the interview progressed, he revealed a conflict between these views and how he had been able to undertake his own fathering duties, and how he had been fathered himself. When talking about the fact he was not allowed contact with his own son, and in fact had not seen him for over two years, he revealed that he'd been told by Social Services that he needed to go to court in order to get contact. This he found difficult:

I go through the court process, it gets so stressful and I hate the sound of "no, you can't have contact" where I'd purposefully commit an offence just to go back to prison so the answer's

not no. So... It's like, the worst, the worst thing I can hear is no. That's the, that's the worst. Oh, I'm trying, going through court trying to get, you know, er, the supervised contact with my child. And I'm afraid things like, ah you gotta do two-year good behaviour and everything and that, that, that stresses me out. It upsets me that in a way. That's the way I go. So I purposefully commit an offence to come in prison so the answer is there is no answer.

As an observer it seemed Ryan needed to prove he had maintained good behaviour for two years then he would be able to have some kind of supervised access to his son, and while that may not be as simple a task as it sounded, it appeared clear that Social Services had given Ryan some idea what he needed to do in order to get contact. However, he kept on committing criminal acts to end up in prison so that it appeared he had an explanation for why Social Services were saying no to contact. This pattern of thinking and behaviour appeared to conflict with Ryan's views on being a good dad as being emotionally available and taking care of family. For example, Ryan said that his son had been his "number one priority" since he had been born, yet he continued to commit more crimes in order to return to prison. While this appeared to be logical to Ryan, as an observer it seemed to be a very conflicting view.

I was keen to know about Ryan's relationship with his own father and how he had been brought up and whether his experiences as a son had helped to form his perceptions of fatherhood. Ryan described his own father as "brilliant" and when asked what he'd done to warrant that description said:

It, it's not what he's done, 'cos as being a father he's always working you know? Mondays to Fridays, weekends even... He's just... if anyone needs anything he's always the first one there, he always helps out. He's straight to the point, erm, and financially if anyone needs help, financially, he, he, he always finds a way to make ends meet. So that's what I've always respected from him.

Clearly Ryan felt his own father had been a good dad because he worked hard and provided financially for his family, reinforcing the breadwinner model of fatherhood. He continued to explain that he had deep respect for his father, who had taught him a good “work ethic” and had supported the family. Ryan was one of 11 children and his father had been the only parent bringing in an income with Ryan referring to his mother as a “housewife”:

You know my father was the only one to go out to work and my mother was the stay-at-home housewife. I’m surprised that my father managed on one [wage]... he was just...

Again, this reinforces the traditional concept of the breadwinner father, providing economically for his children while the mother provided the nurture and care. In addition, despite great respect and admiration for his father Ryan had not had a visit from him since he had arrived in prison eight months earlier. It could be argued that Ryan’s father fitted the breadwinner/emotionally distant father framework. When I asked Ryan further questions about family visits, he revealed:

I haven’t asked for any visitors. Even though we are a close family we’re pretty distant. So if, if you need each other we’re there, we’ll be the first ones there. But otherwise you’re left to your own devices, right, and... You make your own mistakes, you learn from your own mistakes, you know, we’ve been brought up to be like independent but always have them family morals there, if someone needs something, you’re the first one there.

So you haven’t had any visits in eight months?

Not since. I, I, I, don’t want them.

It is not clear from Ryan’s answer whether the family had asked to visit, and he had refused, or whether they had not even offered. Note the dichotomy in Ryan’s line, “even though we are a close family we’re pretty distant”. This appeared to contradict Ryan’s description of family looking after family, or that his father was always there if anyone needed him. Although of course there could be many reasons why the family had not visited, and I did not probe this further. However, my

interpretation was that it appeared as though there were caveats to Ryan receiving his father's support, with him suggesting he had to earn his family's interest or visits:

I, I, I made my bed, so now I gotta sleep in it. How am I ever gonna learn if I, I don't put my foot down and say look, I made this mistake, I don't want you to come visit me because, that's just a bit of what's the word like, extra privileges that I shouldn't really have. I haven't earned them.

So you don't think you've earned visits from your family?

No.

I found this quite difficult to comprehend. On the one hand Ryan believed his father was there for him, but on the other he had not felt he had earned the right to see his father or any member of his family. This struck me as a description of a traditional family where the father was the emotionally distant moral and disciplinarian head of the family and the children had to earn their father's attention and support, rather like the old-fashioned family set up described in prior fatherhood research (see Pleck, 1987; Doherty, Kouneski & Erickson, 1998).

Although Ryan's initial response to the question about what a good dad is suggested someone emotionally supportive, the idea of providing financially for his son started to take on more significance in his answers. This seemed to reflect his own father's role as provider. Ryan revealed that he had plans to save money for his son's future, even if he was not allowed to see him, saying:

Every time I get out of prison I go straight into a job. I tried putting in savings for my son, even though I can't see him there's going to be a pot of money there for him you know?

He also said he felt he had to earn money to help his son, "If you want anything in life, you gotta, you gotta earn it. If I want my son to have a good life, I've gotta earn it for him". Clearly for Ryan a significant part of being a father was providing some financial security or working hard to provide

materially for his child, based on his own experiences. On the other hand, in a situation where he was not allowed to see his child or have any contact with him, or his ex-partner, saving money was essentially the only thing Ryan could do in order to keep some level of relationship, however tenuous, with his son. Overall, Ryan's answers were contradictory. For example, despite saying, "Even though I'm not physically there for [my son] doesn't mean I'm not emotionally there for him", Ryan could essentially not 'be there' either physically or emotionally as he did not have any contact with his child. This suggests a desire to be there for his son, but that in this instance the emotional aspect of fathering was from a distance. Ironically Ryan was caught in a cycle of criminality, which was serving only to drive him further away from his son. Ryan's situation was extremely complex, not least because he had quite distinct views of how he wanted to be a father to his son, but he was expending his energy fighting Social Services as they had put what he felt were unsurmountable barriers in his way to providing for and looking after his son.

5.5 THE BREADWINNER QUESTION

"If you haven't got money that isn't the biggest issue like", Simon, 20

We have already seen that Ryan, 21, was keen to work hard and provide for his son in a traditional breadwinner role, mirroring that of his own father. While other participants had talked about 'providing', only two other interviewees, Dan and Jordan, both 21, spoke in any great length about providing financially for their children as part of being a good dad. Expectant dad Dan, 21, acknowledged that finance was an important part of being a good dad, although he qualified this by saying, "Obviously money isn't everything, but money does help, of course it does like". Dan was keen to get a job as soon as he left prison so he could, "support my family, and I know I need to do that". Looking after his growing family financially was important to Dan, however he did not think this was

solely the father's job, explaining that he and his partner would take an equal role in bringing up their child:

It's gonna be both chip in the same 'cos me working on my own is not gonna be enough to support the family like, so it's gonna be the both of us chipping in equally whether it's working, looking after the baby, taking it, going out places, so yeah, I understand that we both gotta um, equally contribute to everything like.

Dan's answers suggest while he understood the importance of financial provision for his child, this was not solely the father's role and was something that would be shared by both mother and father. This ties in with the ideals of co-parenting that became more prevalent in the 1980s and 1990s (see Morgan, 1996; Doherty, Kouneski & Erickson, 1998) even if research at the time noted that the culture of co-parenting differed greatly from the actual conduct (LaRossa, 1988).

Jordan, 21, also talked about providing financially for his daughter, saying being a good dad was about, "providing, all your time and money on her, all she needs you can get her". Note how provision here is both time and money, suggesting a mixture of both traditional and modern models of fatherhood. Jordan's views of being a good dad also discussed protecting his daughter, which reflects traditional models of fathering as being the moral and physical protector, as he explains:

Making sure she got a safe environment to live in, house over a roof, education, and obviously no one outside picking on her to make her life [INAUDIBLE], makes life go down, you're always there sorting it out.

Jordan had not seen his daughter since he'd been in prison as his ex-partner refused to allow her to visit and much of Jordan's perceptions of fatherhood appeared to reflect his relationship with his younger sister, who he proudly revealed he spoilt with material goods:

When I was on the out I had loads [of money], I was working in a well-paid job so I was spoiling my sister, so I know how it feels not to have nothing and I know kids feel to have everything, like my sister, whatever she wants she'll get like that when I was on the out.

While Jordan seemed to think of fatherhood in quite a traditional way, i.e., that fathers were breadwinners and providers, I would also suggest that his comments about spoiling his sister show that provision was also a way of showing love.

While Ryan, Dan, and Jordan, all 21, had talked about the importance of financial provision in being a good father, most of the interviewees either did not mention finances or did not explicitly say that they considered money to be a major factor in being a good dad. While most acknowledged that money was important at a basic level, they did not think it was as important as spending time with their children and supporting them emotionally. This could be due to the age of this cohort as, Gavin et al. found that:

When the definition of paternal involvement is broadened to include functions other than financial provision, we see that many young, disadvantaged fathers are involved in the early care of their children (Gavin et al., 2002, p. 273).

This could also explain the fact that those who did explicitly mention finances, Ryan, Dan and Jordan, were in the older range of the group of participants.

When I asked Seth, 19, whether he thought you could be a good dad without money, he said, "yeah, 100%", while Simon, 20, admitted that finances were important, "but if you haven't got money that isn't the biggest issue like". Clearly for these young men being present and emotionally available was more important than being just a financial provider. Some of the interviewees talked about doing activities that didn't cost money, such as Christopher, 21, who had positive memories of spending time with his own father:

You don't need money to have fun. We could go to the park. I used to go to the park pouring down rain and love it, d'you know what I mean? I've been to lovely, nice places, but sometimes the best places, you don't need money to go, you just, your bond with just you and them. 'Cos... a lot of people throw money at their children and then they get greedy and they just expect, expect.

Other examples given of simple activities that cost little money were from Simon, 20, who took his daughters to the local pet store to look at animals, and to see the ducks in the park; Jonny, 18, who read to and watched films with his son, and Mo, 18, who was hoping to spend time playing sport with his soon to be born son, “[I want to]play football with him and all that yeah, just, just, just, just, what fathers and sons do innit”. Meanwhile expectant father Jamil, 17, said, “I wouldn't say buying things for the baby is being a good dad” continuing:

Even if you've got money or no money, as long as you're there for your baby, and true, show your baby love, you're always willing to spend time with it, and you couldn't be any person yeah, be a role model, a good role model.

This view was echoed by Jake, 20, father of a five-year-old boy, who said, “a good dad is just loving your son”. All of these examples show how the interviewees thought spending time with their child and loving them is far more important than providing financially and how the ‘care’ aspect of fatherhood was more prominent in these young men’s lives than the ‘cash’ element, a theme that has been discussed in prior research and examined in the literature, (see Cohen 1993; Hobson, 2002).

5.6 BEING A SON

“Thank god that my dad ain't dead but it wouldn't make a difference to be honest, because he's there but he's not there”, Jamil, 17

As previously discussed, many of the interviewees' perceptions of fatherhood were interwoven with their experiences with their own fathers. Whether they had had negative or positive experiences as a son, those experiences had helped to form their views on what being a good dad meant to them. I had decided not to ask a direct question about each interviewee's father in case this acted as a barrier to conversation, see [3.7 Interview questions](#) for more information. However, I found that during the interviews, observations and reflections on their own fathers came quite naturally to most of the participants, so I was able to glean a good sense of the father/son relationship for each interviewee. These of course ranged from those who maintained strong relationships with their fathers, to those who had barely even met their fathers.

When I asked the question 'what do you think makes a good dad' and asked for examples of good dads, two of the young men, Seth, 19, and Jordan, 21, cited their own fathers. Simon, 20, said his dad was a "wicked dad", while Ryan, 21, said his father was "brilliant" and Christopher, 21, said his father was "probably the best dad you could ask for". Despite these positive viewpoints, many of the interviewees had complex relationships with their fathers. For example, even though Jordan, 21, said his own dad was a good dad he had had a fractured relationship with him as he was growing up. Jordan said his father had "liked a drink" so for a number of years had lived apart from the family, but more recently had moved back in with Jordan's mother and things were going well. Jordan was quite an accomplished sportsman and felt his father was a great support to him through school and through his sporting endeavours. Meanwhile Seth, 19, said his own dad had been a good dad because, "He just used to do stuff with me innit, take me out and stuff". Dan, 21, also felt his dad was a good dad as he had, "always worked, worked long hours to support us". Dan felt he would be like his father bringing up his own child, "Everyone says we look the same as well so yeah [laughs]. But nah, yeah, I'll probably be similar in certain ways". Note how Dan talked about his father working "long hours" to support the family, which aligns with the traditional breadwinner model, yet Dan's own answers to what makes a good dad mixed the economic provider narrative with a more caring

attitude and sharing economic provision with his partner. This suggests this cohort blended both old and new fatherhood models.

In contrast some of the other interviewees wanted to be very different fathers to their own.

Expectant father Mo, 18, who had had little interaction with his own father had thought a lot about how he wanted to do things differently:

So obviously like, I always like, when I've grown up I've always had like um when I grow up and have a kid I wanna do all the things that I never do with my dad, so obviously that like kinda like motivates me and I've got like a nice picture in my head like what, what I gotta do and...

What, what, what's that picture look like, what's it..?

Um, just be there for him and just, just be in his life innit, and just be a positive er role model.

Again, the concept of 'being there' both in the physical and emotional sense is paramount in Mo's answer. Also note his use of the term 'role model', suggesting he believes this should be part of the fatherhood role. When I later asked Mo how he would like to be thought of by his children in the future he also used the term 'role model':

Er. What's my dad like... Um, he's a role model. Yeah. Obviously like, with me and that like, I don't wanna be like a, like a, like, yeah, I want like, obviously when I raise him and that I want him to be able to be comfortable with me as well so like, so like, be his best friend as well. Yeah, and all that so like, obviously I know what it's like growing up and like like it's hard innit, when you're a teenager and all that so obviously like, when you've got someone to speak to and, they've gone through all that as well...

So you want him to be able to come and talk to you.

Yeah.

And tell him your worries, tell him, tell him, tell you his worries and stuff rather than....

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Yeah. Yeah. 'Cos I never really had that innit, so, so like 'cos with all that in your mind it just blows up and like you just get angry and you just get moody and you do stupid things and... you end up in here.

Here Mo talks about being a confidante to his children, someone they can talk to, who is friendly and available, cohering with the more caring father construct.

Asif, 17, had not seen his father for several years after telling him he wanted nothing do with him. It could be argued that this had affected Asif's own views of fatherhood, as he explained he wanted to be there for his son as his father had not been there for him:

It made, obviously my dad weren't around to show me the typical things, so... I wanna be there for my son and if he do end, if he do end up doing the wrong thing, at least I can say I gave him, I tried my best you know? Yeah. Yeah.

Again, Asif talks about being there, as well as the narrative of trying his best. Rather like Asif, Jamil, 17, had very little contact with his father, as the following exchange shows:

So do you see your dad at all?

No.

No. Any contact with him.

How can I say? I wouldn't say once in a blue moon when he wants.

When he wants?

Yeah. When he wants to let's put it that way, once, when he feels like, you know what it's been a long time, I ain't spoken to him, then he chat, because I booked a visit for him last week he didn't come.

When I asked Asif how he wanted to be seen by his children in the future he said he wanted to be someone his child could look up to, suggesting a role model. I then asked him how he would like his son to talk about him when he was older, and he replied, "Just, just something good to be honest". This reflects his earlier comments about a good dad being someone who was there for their child, someone they could rely on, and reflects the fact he had little good to say about his own father. Jamil wanted to be a different type of father to his own dad, who he felt had run away from his responsibilities. For his own child Jamil wanted to be more of a 'father figure', a term he used himself:

Father figure yeah. I don't know to be honest how it feels, it's something that I missed out on but I wanna make sure that my child doesn't miss out... so...

Lester, 20, also wanted to bring his children up in a different way to the one he had been brought up.

'Cos I don't wanna keep coming back and they've not got a dad there to support them know what I'm saying and to bond and all that stuff, you know what I mean like, I didn't have that. Not at all. Didn't have one bit of that you know what I'm saying, so, I don't want them like how I grew up. I want them to grow up different, you know what I mean?

Lester also wanted his own child to say 'good' things about him in the future:

[I'd want them to say] Well, my dad's a good dad, good role model and you know what I'm saying good stuff, I don't really want my kids saying bad things about me you know what I mean. So, that's why I wanna get on the, the good path as soon as I come out, you know what I'm saying, so. Yeah?

It was clear that their experiences as sons, whether negative or positive, had had a significant effect on how the interviewees thought of fatherhood and how they wished to act as fathers themselves. For some, these ideas could be considered quite idealistic, which adheres to previous research examined in the literature review that shows fathers in prison can have quite high expectations of fathering, and few doubts that they will be good dads themselves, even if they haven't experienced

good fathering from their own fathers (see Nurse, 2002; Bushfield, 2004; Buston, 2010).

Nevertheless, whether their ideas were impractical or unattainable, and whether they would put them into practice once leaving prison was not in the scope of this research. What is important is their perceptions of fatherhood at this specific time. Also, even if these young men did have high expectations, this could be seen as an opportunity to provide support and resources to help them to try to achieve their fathering ambitions. For those that had poor experiences as sons, who showed a positivity and willingness to act differently to their own fathers, support in this area could help to break the cycle of criminality that research suggests occurs among children who have a parent in prison (Bushfield, 2004; Miller, 2006; Steinhoff & Berman, 2012).

5.7 DISCIPLINE AND PUNISH

“The more you tell someone no, the more they want to do it. So you don’t tell ‘em, you just advise ‘em. You all learn from your own mistakes you know?” Jake, 20

To ascertain more about what the interviewees felt about fatherhood I was keen to ask about discipline. Would they assume that the father is the moral head and disciplinarian of the family as the traditional father construct suggests (see Pleck, 1987)? I specifically asked them whether they thought they would be strict dads or not and probed into how they would or would not discipline their children. Kamil, 21, who was de facto stepfather to his partner’s daughter, found the idea of discipline hard:

So it was, it was hard to come to terms with disciplining her [stepdaughter], telling her what to do, it was just like, it just took its toll slowly, it progressed slowly. And bribery did work sometimes.

Kamil was the only interviewee with a stepchild, and he said one of the main reasons he found disciplining his stepdaughter difficult was because, “she ain’t mine”. This suggests that not being the biological father here meant Kamil did not believe he could discipline his stepdaughter. His biological daughter was only a few months old at the time of the interview, so matters of discipline had not really arisen. Kamil was my first interview, and I did not ask him what type of father (strict or not) he would be in the future as this question was added at a later stage of the interview process. See [3.7 Interview questions](#).

Jake, 20, was open in his views on discipline saying, “everyone’s different innit, everyone brings them up strict, some people are lenient bringing them up, I dunno”. This suggests Jake believed there’s no set pattern or model for fathering and that it’s very much down to an individual’s preference or personality. Later in the conversation he revealed a little more about how he would approach disciplining his son in the future, saying:

The more you tell someone no, the more they want to do it. So you don’t tell ‘em, you just advise ‘em. You all learn from your own mistakes you know?

But when I asked him outright if he had been a strict or lenient dad to his son before coming to prison, he said:

I think I was probably more in the middle if anything. My baby’s mum, she’s more strict than me. I’m more lenient. You know he’s my boy ain’t he. So, it’s all different innit.

While Jake did not explicitly say he would be more lenient with his son because of gender, his use of the term “my boy” does suggest a father/son camaraderie, something he didn’t share with his own father. Jake revealed that his father had “tried telling” him he was going down the wrong path when he was growing up but that, “the more they’d tell me the more I used to do it”. It appears that Jake’s ideas about taking a more advisory than disciplinary role with his son was derived from his own experiences as a son, whereby his father had tried a stricter approach, but he had failed to listen. In

contrast, Thomas, 21, was a little less relaxed in his views, saying he would be a strict dad to his daughter:

And do you think you'll be a strict dad, once she gets a bit older?

Um. With a daughter I think yeah. Especially when she's bringing boyfriends home and that, and I'm thinking, hang on a minute!

What will you be like with that?

I know what I was like when I was that age [Laughs].

Here Thomas has been explicit about the gender of his child and that "with a daughter" he would be stricter.

Scott, 18, who had described being a good dad as someone who was supportive, appeared to continue the support narrative when asked about discipline. I asked him how he would approach the situation if he felt his son was mixing with the 'wrong' people and starting to go down the wrong path. He explained:

I would probably sit down with him and try to have the like conversation about whether or not he thinks that's the right type of people to be hanging around with.

Yeah.

Of course, I never really had that so, the kind of thing that would have helped me, I think that would help him.

As already ascertained, Scott clearly based his ideas of fatherhood on his own father, even if he seemed intent on behaving in the exact opposite way to his dad. It could also be interpreted here that Scott felt his father's lack of guidance and support contributed to his ending up in prison.

On matters of discipline expectant dad Jamil, 17, felt he would be a 'reasonable' dad, and, continuing the advisory trope, would take time to discuss matters with his child:

I would, say if she wanted to go out, or he wanted to go out, right you can go out 'til eight, if you want to stay out a bit longer at least let me know, but don't come home late without telling me, that's the sort of dad that I want to be.

That's the sort of dad? So, reasonable but, you'd have boundaries.

Boundaries, that's the right word for it, 'cos, she's just gonna hate me anyway, if I'm very strict she's just, an example, my mum was very strict with me about smoking, I just done it behind her back anyway. But I mean, I would rather then come to, uh, an agreement about it than telling her no, because she's just gonna do it behind my back, like I'm sure there's something that your parents have told you to do and you're like, fuck it, I'll do it behind her back she won't know it.

Again, Jamil was using his own experiences to form his views on how he wanted to behave as a father. In this instance parenting discipline had come from his mother, rather than his father who was mostly absent. Discipline was clearly something Jamil had thought about, as he explained:

[I] told myself when I have a child I'm gonna be easy on them, 'cos it's just not gonna work, whatever say, they're gonna have to go school, I can't stop them from going to school they're gonna do it anyway, so if you wanna smoke, smoke in the garden please, don't do anything, don't do drug, that's it...

Very sensible.

If you wanna go out just let me know where you're going please make sure I can contact you and enjoy your time. If you have a boyfriend please let me know, you get? 'Cos saying no it's just gonna, she's gonna do it anyway, ah no, I don't got a boyfriend, but we know she's got a

boyfriend, yeah, it just don't work, I've learnt all that. Saying no to a child is just like taking candy away from it, literally.

These themes of support, reasonableness, and openness in terms of discipline clearly resonated with many of the other interviewees. Expectant dad Dan, 21, thought he would be strict to a "certain degree" but continued to say he did not believe in setting out rigid rules. Christopher, 21, stressed that he did not believe in raising his voice to a child because his own father had, "explained things, he never needed to shout, and we'd always listen", but did concede that if his son, "steps out of line he will be told that it's not the right way to go about it". Equally expectant dad Mo, 18, said he'd be a strict dad but "not too strict" and would, "let him do the right and not let him do the wrong, so..." Meanwhile, Jordan, 21, didn't think he'd be a strict dad at all:

Nah. I think I'll be like, not so strict, not too soft but, be more of a, ah yeah, go out and do that or, have this, if you want to go shopping here's the money for it and all that. Like spoil her like.

While Asif, 17, initially said he wouldn't be a strict dad but then listed a set of rules he would lay out to his child:

Do you think you'll be a strict dad or a..?

Um. No, not a, not a strict dad, but, he can do certain things but, like smoking no. Nothing like that, drinking no. Maybe, when he gets older like over a certain age like 18 then live your life, but no, not at the moment no. Yeah.

Again, while these ideas about discipline may seem idealistic, which is not uncommon in younger fathers, (Nurse, 2002; Bushfield, 2004; Buston, 2010) they do show a willingness in the interviewees to take responsibility as fathers and either to mirror what they'd felt were good behaviours from their own fathers, or to change behaviours so they acted differently from their own fathers. They also show an intriguing mix of old and new fathering narratives.

5.8 CONCLUSIONS TO THIS CHAPTER

"It's just like, you love it like, your child and, I dunno, it don't come with a manual saying how to bring up a kid." Jake, 20

Fatherhood is a confusing, complex and 'nebulous' subject (Lewis, 2000; Dermot, 2003). Widely recognised as a social construct (Marsiglio et al, 2000) the meaning of fatherhood has been debated for decades by academics, politicians and cultural commentators and will continue to be debated as values within society shift and recalibrate. While each interviewees' perspective reflected their own experiences, they did, in some respects reflect wider social constructs and were no less complex.

While the overwhelming answer to the question 'what do you think makes a good dad' was 'being there', some of those men who'd described having no or a poor relationship with their own fathers had more diverse and negative views about fatherhood, where it was described as "hard", "challenging", that "no one" could be a good dad, or an inability to express what a good dad was at all, or even to describe one, fictional or otherwise. This could be because they had internalised certain views to support ideologies of fatherhood, particularly those that problematise absent dads (Ermisch & Wright, 1991; Bradshaw et al., 1999; Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 1999). In other words, those participants whose own fathers were absent, may have absorbed the wider, negative interpretations of absent fathers, in addition to their own experiences. In this respect their perceptions of fatherhood were as complex and varied as dominant perceptions of fatherhood, and no one distinct description of fatherhood could be gleaned from the interview data, which coheres with father research (see Williams, 2008).

Having said that, probing the interviewees more about the meaning of 'being there' led to common descriptions of emotionally supporting children, of loving them, playing with them, and pursuing a far more nurturing role than previous generations. These men clearly wanted to care for their children,

and to provide emotionally strong environments for them. They wanted their children to have 'good' lives, and to be happy, an ambition noted in prior research (Cohen, 1993). These men wanted to be good fathers, as expressed by their answers to the question of how they would want to be described by their own children in the future. Unlike research which has suggested that while young fathers want to be good dads they can't articulate what that might mean (Buston, 2010), I found all the interviewees were able to explain to some degree of detail the behaviours and actions they believed made a good dad. Even Kamil, 21, the one interviewee who was unable to describe directly what he felt a good dad was, was able to discuss the behaviours, tasks, and emotions he felt were those of a good dad.

Some researchers believe the idea of the father as breadwinner reached its heyday in the 1950s (Janssens, 1997) yet it could be argued that in the 1950s that description was also about a clearly gendered role and a starker contemporary emotional climate. For some of the young men there was still an element of the 'breadwinner' model in their perceptions of being a good father. Providing financial security for their child or children was important, particularly for Ryan, 21, who expressed the desire to work hard and earn money for his son's future, mirroring his own father's work ethic. Dan and Jordan both 21, and therefore older members of the cohort, also talked about providing economically and working hard. However, they also coupled this with being more nurturing, spending time with their children, and undertaking caring activities, suggesting their perceptions of fatherhood blended both traditional and modern models. While others recognised the need for money, they did not explicitly say that finances were the be all and end all of being a good father. Again, they expressed the need to be more caring, spending more time with their child or children, being supportive and providing an advisory role. None of the interviewees discussed the tension between time and finance.

Nearly all of the interviewees expressed the view that they would not be strict or overly disciplinarian fathers. They thought that talking to their children and listening to them was more important than

setting rules. This was reflected in their views on how they wished to be seen as a father by their children. They wanted to be seen as someone approachable and reasonable and who would help with emotional problems as well as fiscal ones. In many ways these young men valued the concepts of love, kindness, guidance and support when it comes to fathering. They wanted to be good fathers, many expressing a desire to be better or different in their fathering than their own fathers had been. In some cases, this related to their own father's bad or abusive behaviour but for most they simply wanted to be more available to and involved with their children than their own father had been with them.

My analysis of the data within this theme suggests that the interviewees' perceptions of what a good dad was are shaped by their own experiences as a father and their relationships and experiences as sons to their own fathers, whether negative or positive. For those with absent fathers or a poor relationship with their father there was a need to right the wrongs of their parenting, or to do things with their children they had never done with their own fathers. For those with positive experiences as sons there was a desire to mirror their own fathers' behaviour in how they themselves acted as fathers. Yet there was also an attitude of gender neutrality and the use of more therapeutic language with discussions about working with the mother of the children, not just being a distant dad. While they talked about providing for their children, they also discussed ideas about being there, caring and being a supportive guiding father. This would suggest they have absorbed some of the wider social and political viewpoints on fatherhood. This suggests young dads in prison possess the same needs and desires about being good fathers as their peers not caught within the criminal justice system. Yet as we will see in [7.2 Pains of imprisonment](#), it is the very act of being in prison that adds a layer of difficulty for these men to truly be fathers.

Of course, it is a limitation of this research (see [3.10 Limitations of the research](#)) that this is not a longitudinal study and whether or not these men's perceptions matched the reality of their lives as fathers is out of scope. Also, there is some research that suggests fathers in prison can "buy into" the

ideas of fatherhood while in prison because they are not in a position to achieve them (Earle, 2012) or that their ideas could be idealistic and unrealistic (Nurse 2002; Buston 2010), however, I would argue that many of the participants' views of fatherhood resonated with men's views of fatherhood in general now. In terms of recommendations for future work with this cohort of young men, it seems feasible to look at how these desires and ambitions to be good dads could be supported and developed. Whether this would be through educational or support programmes would need to be examined further, but I would argue harnessing an already expressed desire and helping these young men to become the fathers they want to be is likely to be more fruitful than ignoring these desires then expressing surprise when they don't come to fruition.

CHAPTER 6: THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Developing and maintaining external relationships, familial or otherwise, while in prison has long been established as a main driver in the successful rehabilitation of prisoners (Woolf & Tumim, 1991; Nurse, 2002; La Vigne et al., 2005; Ministry of Justice, 2010, p. 83; Visher, 2011; Swanson et al., 2013; Ministry of Justice, 2016; Farmer, 2017; Brunton-Smith & McCarthy, 2017). Ensuring prisoners have the support and resources to mend, create and sustain relationships has been widely recommended over the past decades and the positive outcomes these relationships encourage remains undisputed.

The quantity and quality of external – and to a lesser extent internal – relationships the young men in this study experienced provided a rich and often complex seam of information that demonstrated how relationships, or lack of, affected both their perceptions and their experiences of being a father while in prison. Throughout all 15 interviews, relationships with current partners, ex-partners and their family and friends, as well as grandparents, mothers and fathers, siblings, aunts and uncles, friends, social networks and other prisoners were all discussed. It was clearly shown that relationships

extended beyond the interviewees' immediate families, which aligns with prior research, for example, "It is not only family members who can provide [supportive relationships]" (Farmer, 2017). In this chapter I examine those relationships with the aim of ascertaining how and why they influenced, both positively and negatively, the young men's role as a father or father to be and their direct relationship with their offspring. I also look at how the interviewees' experiences reflect or contradict extant research, as well as suggesting ways in which future policy could be developed around the needs of young fathers in prison with reference to developing and maintaining relationships.

The chapter starts by examining the young men's relationships with the mother or mothers of their child or children, from three perspectives; legally, through marriage and parental responsibility; where the relationship between young father and mother is positive and, finally, where the relationship between young father and mother is negative. The chapter continues with an exploration into the importance of grandparents, both the young men's grandparents, and the child's grandparents, that is the maternal and paternal grandparents, as well as relationships with the wider family network. The next section looks at friendships, both external and within prison, followed by the chapter's conclusion.

6.2 LOVE AND MARRIAGE

"Hopefully when I get out I'll get married and stuff," Simon, 20

Prisoners who are married to the mother of their children are more likely to receive visits and communications, according to research (Hairston, 1989, cited in Visher, 2013, p. 13). Arguably Hairston's research, now more than three decades old, may not reflect current prison statistics, with marriage rates in the UK at "historical lows" according to the Office of National Statistics (ONS, 2019). However, it's worth noting that more recent research has suggested married prisoners potentially

have better outcomes than non-married prisoners, particularly in terms of reducing reoffending.

While findings here need to be treated with caution, explanations offered suggest that:

Marriage creates social obligations that increase the cost of crime; marriage causes significant changes in routines and patterns of association; the female partner exerts direct social control; and finally, marriage leads to a change in self-identity to a more 'responsible' person (Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006, cited in De Clare & Dixon, 2017, p. 2).

When it came to maintaining relationships with their children this did not augur well for the interviewees. None of them were married to the mother or mothers of their children, or to their pregnant partners. This is unsurprising as the average age for a first marriage of opposite-sex couples in 2016 was 33.4 years for men and 31.5 years for women (ONS, 2019), considerably older than this cohort. Marriage rates for men and women under 20 years of age have also decreased dramatically since 2006; by 50% for men and 61% for women (Ibid.). Therefore, it is not an anomaly that the 15 interviewees, who were all aged 21 or under at the time of the interviews, were not married. This also aligns with findings that the majority of young and teenage pregnancies occur outside marriage, although usually within relationships (Hanson, Morrison & Ginsburg, 1989; Miller, 1997; Speake, Cameron & Gilroy, 1997; Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Monsbakken, Lyngstad & Skardhamar, 2013). In fact, the number of births outside marriage or civil partnership across all the UK stands at 48.5%, whatever the age of the parents (Office for National Statistics, 2020), so this could not be considered unusual. If we are to heed the research that married prisoners have better outcomes than non-married prisoners, then the absence of marriage in this group means these young men were already potentially at a disadvantage, both from lacking the assumed – although questionable - stability that marriage can bring and the 'social obligations' that come with it (Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006) and as fathers in legal terms. Legally, unmarried fathers do not have automatic parental responsibility for their children unless they have been added to the birth certificate.

Parental responsibility was first laid out in legal terms in the Children Act, 1989, and was discussed in [2.6 Problem dads](#). Although parental responsibility does not automatically guarantee a father's right to contact with his child or children, it does allow them to have some input into their child's life, such as allowing them to help make or be informed of decisions about their child's religion, school and such (Herring, 2019, p. 441). Although I asked all the interviewees their relationship status with the mothers, I did not ask a specific question about whether they had been added to the birth certificates of their children and therefore would have parental responsibility. In retrospect this would have been useful knowledge to have gleaned. Thomas, 21, was the only participant to mention parental responsibility in any form. although his answers were often confusing. This lack of knowledge of the law among the participants is discussed in more detail in [7.6 The law](#). Initially Thomas did not use the term 'parental responsibility', as can be seen when he told me about going to court to stop his ex-partner's foster parents being granted a Special Guardianship Order¹ (Department for Education, 2017) and get his name put on his daughter's birth certificate:

I got granted um parentage, 50% parental rights, and I got put on the birth certificate, and they said it will be amended, but it won't look like it's ever been amended. So it'll look like I've been on it from the start. Whereas it's just been changed instead.

Note that Thomas uses the terms 'parentage' and 'parental rights' here. When talking about getting the Special Guardianship Order turned down, he said that rather than the foster parents being the primary carers of the baby, caring was now shared or 'split':

So now it's split between the four of us. So local authority have got 25%, I've got 25%, she's got 25%, and her parents got 25%.

It is not clear what exactly has been "split" here, but Thomas continued to say that after court:

¹ A Special Guardianship Order is an order appointing a person or persons to be a child's special guardian. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 provides the legal framework for special guardianship under the Children Act 1989. Section 115(1) of the 2002 Act inserted new sections 14A-F into the Children Act 1989.

Uh yeah, they cannot, cannot give a decision in [the child's] life without me, without me saying or knowing, so they have to ask me permission to take her on school trips and stuff like that.

Which suggests Thomas is talking about parental responsibility. Later he explained the reason he had gone to court while he was in prison and not waited until his sentence was over was because:

I would have had to jump through hoops then, whereas now I'm jumping through 'em. I would have had to get out, I would have had to remain drug free, I would have had to do a DNA test, I would have had to get paren, parental responsibility, parentage, I would have had to get put on the birth certificate, I would have had to build a, a, er, like a working relationship with the parents, so that they speak to me on a, on a normal level. I would have had to like explore the restraining order with [ex-partner] because she wants to be in a relationship with me and I need to protect myself before I get in a relationship with her straightaway, so I had to really.

Again, he uses the term 'parentage' as well as 'parental responsibility'. He also talked about mothers, saying, "They've got 50% parental rights as soon as they're pregnant. Whereas we've got to go to court for it, so..." using the term 'parental rights' rather than parental responsibility. Also, while the law does not deal in percentages, Thomas' use of the term 50% here reflects a demand from the fathers' rights movements, to have 'shared parenting'. Later while talking about going to court he said:

But um, all the applications that I put forward in court got accepted didn't they, I put three forward and they all got accepted. I asked for a care order, parentage, and the responsibility and the birth certificate and they granted them all.

Again, using the term 'parentage'. Despite the terminology confusion it seems likely that Thomas had gone to court to get his name put on his daughter's birth certificate and therefore get parental responsibility. However, later in the interview he didn't seem too certain about what being on the

birth certificate meant or whether he could be removed from it, and revealed he had not even seen the document:

Now if it's been proven that, if it's been proven that that child has got a father then no one else can go on that birth certificate except for that person, so now they, if they didn't want to put me on the birth certificate, they can't put anyone else on there, they just can't, they can't put anyone on it, say unknown. So then.... But um, now I'm on it I don't think, I don't think they can change it now without my permission, so, I haven't got a copy of it so, I don't even know if it's a legal document yet. But, I think, I don't think my solicitor would lie.

Thomas' experiences with the legalities of family law are discussed again in [7.6 The Law](#), but what his answers show here is the confusion around legal details, particularly pertaining to parental responsibility. No other participant mentioned parental responsibility or birth certificates during their interviews, although some did talk about 'getting contact' and 'going to court' after their prison sentences were finished, although none of them discussed what this might entail. This could be interpreted in a number of ways. They were not bothered about legal matters, they were all on their children's birth certificates, or they didn't know about the legal aspects of fatherhood. I would suggest the latter explanation is the most feasible. Clayton (2016) found that 78% of births to teenage mothers were registered in both names, suggesting that the majority of adolescent or young fathers are included on birth certificates and thus have parental responsibility. However, without having asked a specific question I cannot assume this was the case with the interviewees. In addition, Clayton's research was not with adolescent fathers in prison, a situation which may add an extra reason for mothers not to allow the fathers to be added to a birth certificate.

As all the young men were unmarried, and I have no evidence as to whether they were or were not on their children's birth certificate, it seems reasonable to suggest that these young men had to rely more on relationships to remain in touch with their children. We have already ascertained that maintaining relationships while in prison, or as an adolescent father, is challenging. This suggests that

young fathers in prison potentially face double the pressure to maintain those relationships in order to retain contact with their children. In the following two sections I look at the relationships between the young men and the mother and mothers of their child and children and describe how the relationship, whether positive or negative, affected the father's ability to develop and maintain a relationship with their offspring.

6.3 GETTING ON WITH MUM

"I picked the right one", Kamil, 21

Analysis of the interviews showed that any contact the young men had with their child or children, was closely linked with the quality of their external relationships, most particularly with the mother or mothers of their children. Those who described having a good quality relationship with the mother of their children, even if they were no longer in a relationship, had more contact with their children, better communication with their children and more involvement in their children's lives than those who described having a poor or no relationship with their child's mother. This is in accordance with research into adolescent and teenage pregnancies that found the better the relationship between father and mother, the more involved the father is likely to be in their child's life (Cutrona et al., 1997; Gavin et al., 2002; Kalil, Ziol-Guest & Coley, 2005; Herzog et al., 2007), and those that were 'romantically' involved with the mother were more "actively engaged" with their children (Futris & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2007, p. 266). It also aligns with research into fathers in prison – although not necessarily young fathers – which showed that mothers are "central figures" in how the imprisoned father relates and communicates with his child or children (Clarke, et al., 2005, p. 221). Futris & Schoppe-Sullivan (2007) also found that if adolescent parents had a positive co-parenting relationship and that this 'parenting alliance', as defined by Cohen & Weissman (1984) was perceived as strong by the mothers, the fathers were also seen as more engaged. The concept of co-parenting is also

reflected in research into fathers in prison. Note here co-parenting is meant as an informal parenting agreement between mother and father, rather than the more formal and legal shared parenting. For example, Dennison & Smallbone (2015) found that those who maintained a strong parental relationship with their children while in prison cited a 'united front' with the child's primary caregiver. This highlights how important the relationship between mother and father is, rather perhaps that any legal assumptions, in helping fathers to maintain their relationship with their child while in prison.

As discussed, none of the young men in this study were married and only one of the interviewees (Sam, 20) talked about getting married. He was hoping to propose to his girlfriend after his release. Seven of the interviewees were still in relationships with the mothers, three of them were no longer in relationships with the mothers, but described having good interactions with them, and five of the interviewees did not have good or any type of relationship or contact with the mothers. Two of the interviewees had children by two different mothers. Seth, 19, was in a relationship with the mother of his soon-to-be-born child and had retained some level of communication with the mother of his first child. Lester, 20, did not have a good relationship with the mother of his first child, but had some level of communication with the mother of his soon-to-be-born child, although they were no longer in a relationship.

The following table shows the relationship each interviewee claimed to have with the mother of their child or children. Note Seth, 19, and Lester, 21, had a child with one mother and were both expecting a second child with a different woman, so they appear twice in the table. It must be noted that this research did not extend to validating the interviewees' viewpoints with the mothers in question and is therefore reliant on the young men's perceptions only. See [3.10 Limitations of the research](#) for more information.

TABLE 5: PARTICIPANTS' RELATIONSHIP WITH CHILD OR CHILDREN'S MOTHER

Interviewee	Relationship with mother	Contact with child or communications about child
Kamil, 21	Good and still together in a relationship	Regular visits and communications
Simon, 20		Regular visits and communications
Mo, 18		Partner pregnant - regular communications, no visits
Dan, 21		Partner pregnant - regular communications and visits
Jamil, 17		Partner pregnant - regular communications, no visits
Jonny, 18		Regular communications, limited visits
Seth, 19		Mother 2 pregnant - regular communications and visits
Jake, 20	Good but no longer in a relationship	Regular communications, no visits (self-imposed)
Christopher, 21		Regular communications, no visits
Thomas, 21		No visits or communications due to legal and Social Services interventions
Seth, 19		Mother 1 - visits and communications hindered by maternal grandfather
Lester, 20		Mother 2 - limited communications, no visits
Scott, 18	Poor/no relationship with mother	No visits and indirect communication due to legal and Social Services interventions
Ryan, 21		No visits or communications due to legal and Social Services interventions
Lester, 20		Mother 1 – no contact - mother refusing
Asif, 17		No contact (self-imposed)
Jordan, 21		No contact - mother refusing

The seven young men who were still in relationships with the mothers had more communications and visits from their partners and children compared to the other interviewees. Note here that four of these, Mo, 18, Dan, 21, Jamil, 17 and Seth, 19 were expectant fathers – three expecting their first child and Seth expecting his second. Although it is out of scope of this research it would be interesting to note whether those relationships survived in the same state after the birth of the child, or whether the stresses and strains for both mother coping on the outside and father coping on the inside strengthened or weakened those bonds. Research indicates that paternal involvement of adolescent or young fathers tends to decline after a few years, (Miller, 1997, p. 60; Gee & Rhodes, 2003; Bunting & McAuley, 2004). Cutrona et al., (1998) found: “only a minority of adolescent fathers maintain relationships with their children over time”, and that:

...the quality of the relationship between the young mother and the baby's father six weeks after delivery predicted continuing involvement. The more supportive and intimate the relationship, the more likely the baby's father was to remain involved (Ibid., p. 382).

There is no evidence from this study to suggest that the four expectant fathers, or indeed the young men who were already fathers, would wish to reduce contact with their children over time. In fact, none of the 15 interviewees talked about not wanting to ever see their child or children or wanting to reduce any current contact or communications. Nevertheless, what the research suggests is that non-resident young fathers in particular tend to reduce contact with their children and therefore helping them to develop good quality relationships becomes significantly more important (Speake, Cameron & Gilroy, 1997; Kalil, Ziol-Guest & Coley, 2005).

Some of the young men still in relationships felt the birth of their child or children had brought them closer together and expressed positive views about the mothers. Describing his partner as “an amazing mum” Jonny, 18, said:

She tries everything she can. She wakes up certain hours in the morning, and all that, she does everything, she always takes him out. She lets me see him and speak to him and all that.

Note here the phrase “lets me see him and speak to him and all that”. This suggests that Jonny’s partner is in control of his contact with his son and that he only sees or hears from him because she has allowed it. When questioned further about being ‘allowed’ to see his son Jonny said, “She lets me speak to him and see him, certain mothers don’t, they just argue and use kids as weapons”. This idea that children could be used as ‘weapons’ between parents was also mentioned by expectant dad Asif, 17, and is discussed in [6.4 Gatekeeper mums](#).

Simon, 20, was in a long-term, stable relationship with the mother of his two children and, as, aforementioned, was planning on asking her to marry him once he’d finished his sentence. He had nothing but praise for his partner, saying she “Just does everything” for his two daughters and that “She’s just looking after my kids like. She is good like, she’s really good”. Simon said that his partner and children visited “once a week” and that apart from his mother, his partner and the two children were the only people on his visiting list, saying, “I wouldn’t book the, I wouldn’t book the boys or all my mates on a visit because obviously I’d miss out on time with my kids then”. It appeared as if Simon was determined to maintain contact with both his partner and his children, and insisted he was “a big part of their life still”, suggesting Simon felt he could still contribute as a parent while inside, although, it could be argued, his relationship with the mother was clearly an important aspect of this contribution.

Like Simon, Kamil, 21, had a strong relationship with his partner and saw his daughter and stepdaughter in visits and had regular phone and mail communications. For Kamil this relationship not only allowed him contact with his children, but also appeared to boost his self-esteem and was helping him to change some previous unhelpful behaviours, which correlates with research (La Vigne et al., 2005; Visher, 2011; Swanson et al., 2013; Ministry of Justice, 2016; Brunton-Smith & McCarthy, 2017). As Kamil said of his partner:

She writes me card after card saying I'm her soulmate, I'm her best friend. And when I was on tag, she um, she realised how much of a good dad I was. And how I um would get up at seven, cos, I'm as lazy as hell, I'm lazy. I'd stay in bed at home I would stay in bed until 12. But then I had to make a change. It was either make a change or go the other way. So I made a change, and I was getting up at 7.30, dressing the baby, helping my stepdaughter...

Those interviewees whose partners were pregnant also claimed learning about the forthcoming baby had brought them closer together. In addition, it was helping to form bonds with other family members. For example, Mo, 18, said his pregnant partner was spending time with his mother:

I just spoke to my baby mum today and like they're with each other, my baby mum's playing with my little sister, they're in the park feeding ducks and that so, a little family time already.

Mo appeared to find this family bonding comforting.

Jamil, 17, said his relationship with his pregnant partner was "not looking breakable at this point in time" and said they were talking on the phone regularly where she was keeping him up to date with the pregnancy. However, he had not received many visits from her due to logistics as she lived a significant distance from the prison. Nevertheless, as the interview progressed Jamil did admit to some qualms about the relationship, observing, "I think we'll be good; I don't think we'll break up, hopefully not anyway. First love innit, so..."

Dan, 21, was in a long-term relationship with his partner and there was regular communication between them about the pregnancy. He was concerned that he needed to 'be there' for her as much as he could while he was in prison:

I've got to be there for her as much as I can, even though it's over the phone and I'm not there in person, I've gotta be there for her as much as I can over the phone. I ring her every night. You know, to support her and stuff, so...

This emotional connection and support for a partner and baby aligns with the construct of the “new nurturant father” (Mormon & Floyd, 2006, p. 114) and the importance of a more emotional relationship between a father and a child (Featherstone, 2009), as discussed in [Chapter 5: Being a good dad](#). With regard to relationships however, Dan’s regular communication with his partner was not only helping to maintain that relationship, but also helping him to emotionally connect with his unborn child.

Of the five young fathers who maintained a good relationship with the mother or mothers of their children, even if they were no longer in a relationship, four had some level of communication with the mother and through them with the child or children, but none of them had any physical visits, for a number of reasons. One, Seth, 19 was being hindered in getting contact with his child through the maternal grandparent. The mother of Seth’s first child had maintained communications with him even though he was now in a relationship with another woman (who was pregnant with his second child), but neither she, nor his son, had been in to visit as they lived with the mother’s father (maternal grandparent) and he had, according to Seth, prohibited it.

Seth felt the situation was unfair and that the prison should let the mother in to visit with the child, even though it was not the prison that had objected to the visits, “They should because I’m the dad and the mum’s fine with it. Nothing to do with her dad”. When questioned further Seth did not make it clear why the mother’s father was able to stop his daughter and grandchild visiting. It could be that the mother was under the age of 18, or that there was some kind of legal restriction prohibiting any contact, but without direct evidence this is supposition on my part. What it does show is that, in Seth’s case, even when he and the child’s mother appeared to have maintained good communications his poor relationship with her father meant he was not able to see his son. In Seth’s case neither the child’s mother nor him as father were in control of the situation. This reflects research that suggests a young father’s relationship with his child or children was dependent on

others, and not just the mother (Speake, Cameron & Gilroy, 1997; Kalil, Ziolo-Guest & Coley, 2005; Swanson et al., 2013).

Although no longer in a relationship, Jake, 20, had a good relationship with his ex-partner saying she actively encouraged him to have contact with his son:

Yeah, brilliant, she's got her, she does her own thing. She's, she's really good with him about that, she isn't "ah you can't see him", if anything she's like "when are you going to see him?"
Yeah.

However, while he had regular communication with his ex-partner and his son, Jake had self-imposed a no visit rule, preferring to wait until his sentence had finished before physically seeing him. Jake explained this was because he felt the prison environment was not acceptable for his son to visit. This reflects research discussed in the literature review that found some men did not allow their children to visit, known as 'hard timing' (Nurse, 2002). Nevertheless, maintaining a good relationship with his ex-partner had allowed Jake to be involved in his son's life, even if from afar.

Christopher, 21, had also not physically seen his son but this was more for logistical reasons than self-imposed. Initially the relationship between Christopher and the child's mother had not been good, but they had agreed to work together for the sake of the baby:

Then I thought, we both thought to each other, there's no need to be like this. We might not get along, but we've got to get along for the baby's sake. D'you know what I mean? 'Cos, it's not nice, you see families that always split up and then always going through court and Social Services. I've seen it, I've been through it, I don't need to, I don't want my, my son to ever go through anything like that so, I wanna build the best life for him I can.

This reflects research from the USA that shows a strong 'co-parenting' ethos, or 'parenting alliance' can increase a non-resident father's contact with his child (Cohen & Weissman, 1984; Futris & Schoppe-Sullivan 2007). Despite this thawing of relations Christopher had not been able to physically

see his son as he had been born in prison and was still in prison with his mother. There were plans for him to see his child once the mother was released, but these were not formal as Christopher was in prison several hundred miles away from where his ex-partner, child, and the rest of his family lived. He was trying to get a transfer to a prison nearer to them but had so far been unsuccessful. This was evidently restricting the opportunities Christopher had for developing a relationship with his son and maintaining the relationship with his ex-partner.

Lester, 20, did not have a good relationship with the mother of his first son and he said she had stopped him from seeing the child. When I asked what contact he had he said: "Nothing at all, she don't, she don't even want me to see him so. It's..." However, he admitted he got on OK with the mother of his soon to be born child.

Well, the relationship is alright to be fair like, we do get along, we just have our little differences, we're always having a go at each other but other from that yeah, like, she would not stop me from seeing my son.

Note how Lester is pretty certain here that the woman would allow him contact with his son. He continued to say that she was planning to come and visit him with the child when it was born but Lester was not sure. Rather like Jake, Lester did not want his child to have memories of visiting him in prison.

She even wants to come here and let that I can see him, but I'm saying when I'm in jail I don't really want that to happen you know what I mean.

As discussed in [4.4 Attending the birth](#), Thomas, 21, had a complex relationship with the mother of his daughter admitting there was a restraining order in place, and he was not allowed any contact with her. Despite the restraining order he claimed they still wanted to be in a relationship, explaining, "She wants to be in a relationship with me and I want to be in a relationship with her but she's got a 10-year restraining order against me". Thomas seemed to feel the restraining order was unfair and said

his ex-partner had been told if she revoked it, she may not be able to see the child and that he risked a prison sentence if they contacted each other, "I can get out now, she wants to speak to me I want to speak to her and I'm risking 10 years in prison just speaking to her". With the restraining order in place, legally Thomas could not maintain his relationship with his daughter's mother. This could potentially jeopardise any chances of Thomas developing a relationship with his daughter. However, Thomas revealed that the mother lacked "the capacity to meet the basic child needs due to cognitive ability" and that the child was being looked after by the mother's foster parents. In a sense, the mother here is not the main link between Thomas and his daughter and Thomas' relationship with the primary carers of the child (the foster parents) is more important.

6.4 GATEKEEPER MUMS

"She's just trying to ruin my life as well she is," Jordan, 21

As already described, those with good quality relationships with the mothers of their children had better contact and communications with them. Those fathers who had a poor or non-existent relationship with the mother or mothers of their children had, in turn, a poor or non-existent relationship with their children. This coheres with research that shows a negative mother/father relationship acts as a barrier to father interaction. For example, in research from the USA and South Korea, Swanson et al (2013, p. 543) cited "children's mother's attitude" as one of the two biggest barriers to an imprisoned father being able to maintain a relationship with his child or children. The other barrier in this research was the child's attitude, which does not apply in this instance as all children were either babies or very young, and therefore not in a position to decide whether or not they wanted to see their fathers. Further research has found that, "When parents have a poor relationship, mothers may block fathers' access to children" (Kalil, Ziol-Guest & Coley, 2005, p. 199) and that, "The findings suggested a significant, negative association between maternal gatekeeping

and paternal involvement” (Fagan & Barnett, 2003, p. 1036). In other words, the more negative the relationship between mother and father, the less likely the father is to be involved in his child’s life.

The five interviewees who described having a poor or no relationship with the mother of their children also had no contact with their children. This was for numerous reasons, not just because the mother was acting as a ‘gatekeeper’.

Father of one Ryan, 21, had one of the more complex relationships with the mother of his son. He explained that he was not allowed to see the baby and there was a restraining order against him, so he was not allowed any contact with his ex-partner either. Although I did not ask for more details of the restraining order, it is likely to have been granted under Section 5 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. As he explained:

After Social Services [got involved] they’ve always put it like if I want contact I’ve got to go through court, if anything I gotta go through court, if I try contacting the mother, she’s gotta phone the police and have me up for harassment, which isn’t, it never was, you know I sent her a couple of messages asking how she was, how the baby was and obviously she had to report that to Social Services and they’ve said, ‘oh go to the police’, having me done for harassment...

Ryan was not allowed any contact with mother or child, yet this had not stopped him from trying to retain some kind of relationship and send letters to his son:

Yeah, now that there’s a restraining order in place, on [Christmas], on his birthdays and that, I send the letter to their address, to my son, then they say well that could be classed as indirect contact with [INAUDIBLE], well no it’s not, it’s not for her, it’s for my son, but he’s still a young age. That doesn’t matter. That letter is not for her. So, if she wants to open it for [ANONYMISED] then she does that, otherwise she can keep it for him. It’s, it’s not her mail. That’s, that’s how I’ve always looked at it. So we send birthday cards. I, I, I can’t say that I’ve

never sent one because I have, I can't say that I've never tried because I have, it's just the support of physically being there.

For Ryan, there was little point in attempting to develop or maintain any relationship with this ex-partner or her family because of the restraining order. Trying to contact his son through letters put him in a risky position as he would be in breach of court orders, according to his account. He could not even find out how his son was through his parents, as they did not have contact either, as he explained, "It's not that they don't want to. It's the, it's the strict pattern. Social Services says 'Oh, if anyone tries contacting you, go to the police'". Ryan said he did not blame his ex-partner for the situation, saying, "It's not her fault you know? She's just trying to be a good parent. Same as, same as myself". And he appeared to lay any blame for the situation with Social Services, who, he felt, were blocking any attempts he made to see his ex-partner or his son.

Unlike Thomas, who was working with Social Services (and effectively developing his relationship with them rather than with the child's mother), Ryan appeared to be fighting against Social Services, claiming "they've shut me out" and that dealing with them was "just like hitting a blank [sic] wall". Neither Thomas, nor Ryan, discussed the restraining orders against them and the reasons they had been implemented. Domestic violence may or may not have been the issue, but it is reasonable to assume that there were problems with the treatment of both mothers by the participants. This raises the question of whether a father should not see a child because of the treatment of the mother. It is a hotly debated issue and a more thorough investigation of the literature around it is out of scope of this research. The assumption that contact with a non-resident parent is almost always in the best interest of the child is prominent within the courts and professionals including lawyers and mediators, according to Kaganas (2018, p. 445), yet there is also research that suggests shared parenting does not always promote child welfare, one of the key aspects of the Children Act 1989. As Kaganas opines:

While co-operative co-parenting may serve children's best interests, there are concerns about harm caused by conflict, exposure to domestic violence and erratic visiting (Kaganas, 2018, p. 555).

Without fully understanding the reasons behind both Thomas' and Ryan's restraining orders, it is impossible, within the limits of this research, to discuss whether them getting contact with their children would be beneficial to the child. This does not mean that I am passing over the sensitive issue of domestic violence and the harms it can cause. For the purposes of this study, what is of import here are the ways in which Thomas and Ryan have approached their situation. We will see later in [7.5 The Social](#), that Ryan had become blocked from contact with his son through his relationship, or lack of with Social Services. Whereas with Thomas we have already seen that he has attempted to 'work with' Social Services in order to get contact with his daughter after his release from prison. This shows that these men's relationships with State agents are just as important as their relationships with the mother of their children, friends, and family.

Like Ryan, Scott, 18, also said he was limited from contact with his son by Social Services, although he did not elaborate on why this may be. Unlike Ryan there was no restraining order in place with the mother, they just did not get along. Scott's ex-partner did not want to see him but had not objected to his having indirect contact with his son. In addition, Scott's mother saw the child from time to time, providing a crucial link. In contrast to Ryan but in the same vein as Thomas, Scott said he was working closely with Social Services, abiding by their indirect contact rules, and working with them on plans for supervised contact with his son after his release. Again, as with Thomas, Ryan and Scott did not need to maintain a relationship with the mother of their children but with Social Services, which had become the primary link between them and their children.

Although the involvement of Social Services in the interviewees' lives will be examined in depth [7.5 The Social](#), it is pertinent to note here that for some of the men Social Services were the one and only connection between them and their children. It is not unreasonable to suggest that future policy and

work with young dads in prison could include support in dealing with Social Services. The level of support of course would depend on the legal status of the child. For example, if the child is in care then there are legal obligations on the local authority to ensure ongoing contact with the parents (Children Act 1989, Part III, Section 237A). If the child is not in care (as was the case with Thomas, Ryan, and Scott's children), then the role of Social Services is very different.

Lester and Jordan had no legal restrictions against them but neither of them had contact with their children as the mothers did not allow it. Lester, 20, said the mother of his first child did not communicate with him or allow him any contact with his son, as he explained, "Nothing at all she don't, she don't even want me to see him so..." Lester did not believe there was much he could do about the situation while he was in prison, and was waiting until his release to pursue matters legally, although he had no definite plans for what this may entail when questioned further.

Jordan, 21, also had challenges seeing his daughter as his ex-partner would not allow it, as he explained, "Since I've been here [in prison] as well, she's tried to stop me, so when I get out I'm gonna start fighting for custody as well". Note Jordan's use of the term 'custody' here rather than 'contact', suggesting perhaps that he was looking to have more than just visits with his daughter. Later in the interview Jordan revealed his ex-partner had not allowed him to see his daughter before he came to prison, "she didn't want me to see her at all" in response, according to Jordan, for something that had been posted on Facebook. His nan [Jordan's terminology], had been allowed to see the child however, and provided a critical link between him and his daughter with regular communications, even if he had not seen her physically.

Jordan did not have a good relationship with his ex-partner, who he said, "Still slags me off over Facebook now when I'm in here." Presumably Jordan had no access to Facebook in prison, so it is assumed here that he heard about this through friends. He also appeared to blame his ex-partner for his current situation, not just with his lack of contact with his daughter, saying, "She's just trying to ruin my life as well she is". For Jordan, the relationship with his ex-partner was in a poor state. Apart

from pursuing the matter of contact through the courts, which, like Lester, Jordan said he was going to do after his release from prison, Jordan's main relationship link with his daughter was through his nan. It could be suggested here that future family work with prisoners could focus on these poor relationships and offer prisoners support and resources for improving them. Not just through ensuring prisoners get adequate access to visits and communication channels, but also in terms of conflict resolution, negotiating skills and anger management.

Expectant father Asif, 17, did not have a relationship with the mother to be after she had been "rude" to him, saying, "I have no contact with her innit, I don't speak to her". This lack of communication about the pregnancy was self-imposed as Asif said, "I don't want nothing to do with her to be honest. She's a bit, you know, mad in the head, so... I just want to see my kid and, that's it". He fully expected he would have "full access" [Asif's terminology] to the child when he was released from prison. He also admitted he did not want to keep phoning the mother to be as it might come across as nagging, "I ain't really gonna phone her because it'd be like a kinda nagging kinda thing so I'm just gonna wait until I'm out". Asif also claimed the mother-to-be was using the child "as a weapon", even though he admitted he had stopped communications. This suggests a contradiction in Asif's relationship with the mother. On the one hand he thinks she's "mad in the head" and using the child against him, on the other he appears to be worried about nagging her. It seems reasonable to suggest here that Asif did not have the skills needed to manage this relationship, and he would benefit from some support. Note also how Asif's answers reflect some of the arguments seen in the fathers' rights movement, whereby men believe mothers are in the wrong and use their children as weapons against them (see Sheldon, 2001; Collier 2005).

Conflictual relationships with teenage mothers are often cited as a barrier to contact with a child by teenage and young fathers (Bunting & McAuley, 2004). And mothers have often been cited as being 'gatekeepers' to their children (Nurse, 2002). When a father is in prison, the mother of the child generally holds the power over visits and contact (Clarke et al., 2005), yet the mother's reasons for

not bringing a child in for a visit can differ to what the father thinks. Young fathers often claim they want to have more contact with their children, and would if they could, although many young mothers would say paternal disinterest is one of the reasons why fathers don't see their children, i.e., the father does not proactively try to see his children (Bunting & McAuley, 2004).

One of the limitations of this research is that the answers the young men gave were not validated or complicated by discussions with the mothers in question. Therefore, we have to rely on the young men's perceptions of their own situations. While admittedly a limitation, this is also a key aspect of the chosen methodology of this research. The intention was not necessarily to see their situations from all aspects, but to gather data that provides access to ideas, perceptions, and talks to the extant literature. What is clear though is that a good relationship with the mother is absolutely critical for maintaining contact. If there is no relationship with the mother of the child, then the father has very little control over access and contact and can find it difficult to even locate their children. This aligns with previous research into fathers in prison, e.g., Magaletta & Herbst (2001) and Dennison & Smallbone, (2015), which noted that one father in their study claimed he had to "rely on" his partner for everything to do with his children while he was imprisoned, again highlighting the man's lack of control or ability to do anything without the consent and involvement of the mother. This also highlights that there is an absence of policy directed at fathers. This is in contrast to the policies directed at mothers in prison. For example, there are six mother and baby units (MBUs) in the 12 female prisons in England (Ministry of Justice, 2020c). These allow "the mother/baby relationship to develop if it is in the child's best interests to do so, whilst safeguarding the child's welfare" (Ibid., p. 7). There is also the Female Offender Strategy (Ministry of Justice, 2018) and the Pregnancy, Mother and Baby Units and Mothers in Prison Policy Framework (Ministry of Justice, 2020b), whose aims include:

- Every female prison to have resident mother and baby specialist
- Extra training for staff on looking after pregnant prisoners

- New advisory group to ensure support for such women (Ibid.)

Of course, these policies do have their detractors, and some will argue that they do not go far enough (see Booth, Masson & Baldwin, 2018). What is pertinent here is that there is nothing as specific for fathers and especially not for young fathers. It is a point of recommendation that policy should be developed for young fathers in prison, perhaps using learnings from the mothers in prison policies.

6.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF NANS

“Whenever my nan has her, I’ll see her with me nan like, on the sly type thing like innit,” Jordan, 21

An unexpected but significant theme that arose during the interviews was the importance in the young men’s lives of their grandmothers, or ‘nans’, which was the vernacular used by nearly all of the interviewees. Some of the young men had been brought up by their nans due to family circumstances, or they had spent a significant amount of time with their grandmothers – and to a lesser extent their grandfathers – during their younger years. Some had turned to their nans for advice, both emotional and practical, during their journey into fatherhood, and one of the interviewees (Jordan, 21), cited his nan as instrumental in being able to see his daughter, even when the child’s mother did not allow it, which will be examined further in this chapter.

There is burgeoning research into the relationships between grandparents and grandchildren, particularly with regard to care. In her examination of grandparent groups, Kaganas notes that there have been campaigns aimed at allowing grandparents increased rights to contact with their grandchildren, and campaigns aimed at highlighting the growing number of grandparents who take an integral role in the care of their grandchildren (Kaganas, 2018, pp. 18-19). In the UK, grandparents have no legal right to contact with their grandchildren, although they can apply for contact – through a Child Arrangements Order – under section 8 of the Children Act, 1989. Legal questions aside for the

moment, other research has found that “grandmothers are involved with their grandchildren more than grandfathers are” (Smith, 2005), and that grandparents can act “as confidants” to their grandchildren, possibly because they have a close familial relationship but no authority role, meaning the child feels more able to confide in them without repercussions (Tyszkowa, 1991). Meanwhile, research in the USA has found that there is an increasing number of grandparents looking after children on a formal basis, including where one or more parent is in prison, for example:

A grandparent can act as a “safety net” for children whose families have been damaged or broken by death, drug abuse, family violence and abuse, incarceration, or divorce (Hayslip & Kaminski, 2005, p. 263).

The findings about grandparents, and particularly grandmothers, offering support and influence, was reflected among the interviewees, with only three not mentioning grandparents at all (Jake, 20, Scott, 18 and Asif, 17). Mo, 18, did not mention his own grandparents, but talked about his pregnant partner’s nan who was going to attend prison visits with her; while Lester, 20, said he knew he had grandparents but had never met them. The remaining 10 interviewees all talked about their own grandparents in some capacity or at least acknowledged that they were part of their wider family group. For three of the interviewees, (Kamil, 21, Christopher, 21 and Jamil, 17), the relationship with their nans was significant as they had all lived with them (and in Christopher’s case with his grandfather too) for a period because of issues within the family home.

Kamil, 21 explained why he had gone to live with his nan, “I never had a dad. It was just mum, and mum was on the offside. With drugs. Um, so I went and lived with my nan”. Kamil explained that his nan had been there “for support” but did not cite her as someone he had turned to when he was learning the basics of childcare. These he said he learnt from his partner and caring for his siblings.

Christopher, 21, had spent a lot of time with both his maternal grandmother and grandfather, explaining that “they took me in”. Although he said he had been in care for a period he did not explain why he needed to be “taken in”, but did say:

... my dad's mum, my sister always used to go with her, and then I used to go with my mum's, my mum's mum, my nan and grandad. They'd just take me all over the world, I've been everywhere with them. Lived with them. They've done everything for me.

He also credited his maternal grandparents with teaching him “nice manners” and taking him to “five-star hotels, posh restaurants, so, I learnt to speak and act different”, and when talking about being a father to his own son Christopher said, “obviously I'll probably do the same thing with him”, showing how he had learnt some ideas about parenting from his grandparents.

The support and influence of Christopher's grandparents had continued while he was in prison, although due to logistics they were finding it hard to visit him, as he explained, “Me nan and grandad they're like 80 odd and they're travelling down here every other week and that, it's just not fair”. He also called them “amazing” and said they were “the most caring people”. When asked who he had learnt basic childcare skills from Christopher responded that both his grandmothers (maternal being ‘nan’ and paternal being ‘grandma’) had helped him, “My nan and gran, my grandma, she's amazing, she's just like, ah, do this, this, and this, and teach me like little things and...” Christopher's maternal nan and grandad, and paternal grandma, had been important influences on him in his youth, and continued to help and support him through his journey into fatherhood.

Jamil, 17, had also lived with his grandmother after issues within his family home, as he explained:

Uh, growing up, it was domestic issues and whatnot with mum and dad, dad went away for several years, in prison, didn't have... fell out with my mum a little bit, moved in with my gran.

However, this period in Jamil's life appeared to herald the start of his criminal activities:

Then started, how can I say it, it felt like I didn't have no one [ANONYMISED] so I started doing stupid stuff, following other people, doing petty crimes, then I had a, got kicked out of secondary school, my life just went downhill basically...

Jamil also did not credit his grandmother with help and support about becoming a father and did not mention her again as the interview progressed, although equally I did not question his relationship with her further. However, it can be surmised that while he had spent time with her as a younger child, there is little to indicate that Jamil's grandmother was an important source of support or influence in his journey into fatherhood.

The remaining seven interviewees all talked about their nans (and to a lesser extent their grandfathers) in some way. For example, Simon, 20, said his nan was "very important" in his life, while Dan, 21, said his grandad had been very helpful, bringing his pregnant partner in to see him for visits and that he himself had: "...always had support off um grandparents and stuff, yeah". Although Jonny, 18, had not lived with his nan, he had spent significant time with her as he was growing up, saying, "she was always there for me and every time I was getting stressed out and all that she could calm me down". Jonny had had a particularly chaotic upbringing, moving in and out of the care system and, at times, singlehandedly looking after his younger siblings. He had also missed a lot of formal schooling but said his nan had helped him with his education, "My nan was the one who kept me in school and used to teach me how to do things, used to teach me how to read", and that, "she done as much as she could for the family. She always managed to do what... everything little thing to help us out". Sadly, Jonny's nan had passed away from brain cancer. After telling me this in the interviews Jonny appeared to become emotional and much of his side of the conversation became inaudible when I played the recordings back during analysis, for example:

And unfortunately she ended up passing away on her birthday... so it was....being [INAUDIBLE] family [INAUDIBLE] I can't go and see 'em being in here and that, so it's a bit stressful being in here.

Thomas, 21, had rather more cheerful memories of his nan, saying he had been sent to stay with her as “punishment” when he had been misbehaving:

I used to go and live with my nan when I used to get into trouble because I, she used to sort me out yeah (laughs).

Did you?

I'd go, like my punishment would be I'd have to go to my nans for two weeks or something. And ur, oh fucking hell, funny, my nan.

For Jordan, 21, his close relationship with his nan had enabled him to see his daughter before he came to prison, and to maintain ties with her while he was inside. This was despite the fact the child's mother had prohibited him from seeing her, albeit not through legal means. The child's mother had said his nan and his great nan could see the child but no one else in his family was allowed. Before he was sentenced his nan had brought the daughter to see him “on the sly”, as he explains:

I'll just tell me nan 'get her, get her for day release' and I'll meet my nan somewhere without her [ex-partner] knowing and I'll see her that way. So I was doing it that way, so I was doing it behind her back but they didn't know how I was seeing her.

These covert meetings involved some organisation and seemed rushed, nevertheless they had allowed Jordan some contact with his daughter:

It was nice, obviously my nan would text me when she get in the car, 'got her, meet me so and so place', so obviously I'd go there, meet her, and when she'd take she goes 'ah we gotta go now' and I felt like I didn't have long. 'Nah, a little bit longer' and she'd go 'nah we've only got her for a couple of hours like'. No, so I couldn't get time on my own so my nan obviously, my nan said 'yeah, sit on the other side, the other side', where we was, there was no time, just me and her on my own but I know my family also been there as well like.

Since being in prison he had not seen his daughter as his ex-partner would still not allow it. Although Jordan's nan was still seeing the child every month, she was not permitted to bring her on a visit, 'I said to [ex-partner] can my nan bring her in to see me she goes 'nah, it's a horrible place and that...'" However, his nan – and his great nan – provided an important link in his communication about his daughter:

Whenever she's not working or when she's free she goes 'I'll come down for the day, come down and see her', and also my great nan come down as well and sees 'em and she tells me whenever she comes in and sees me she tells me how she's getting on and that, sends me photos and that.

Jordan's nan was clearly an important conduit to contact (albeit not physical) with his daughter.

It cannot be said that the three interviewees who did not mention their grandparents (Jake, 20, Scott, 18 and Asif, 17) did not have strong relationships with and were not supported by their grandparents, simply that they did not talk about them. No specific question about grandparents was asked, although many of the other interviewees responded to the question about who had been important to them in their earlier lives by discussing their grandparents. However, the remaining 12 interviewees who did talk about their grandparents (or their partner's grandparents) had experienced from them a combination of emotional succour, practical support, and moral teaching. For these young men their nans, and to a lesser extent their grandfathers, had been important influences in their earlier lives and for some had helped them with the practical elements of childcare, and enabled them to maintain links – however tenuous – with their child or children.

6.6 THE CHILD'S GRANDPARENTS

"Because my mum's really good with him like. She keeps him over and that yeah, yeah but", Jake, 20

Extant research has found that paternal grandparents, in particular grandmothers, can be a great source of support to young fathers (Miller, 1997; Speake, Cameron & Gilroy, 1997; Bunting & McAuley, 2004). In other words, that the young men's own parents, that is the grandparents of the young father's child or children, provided help, information and support. Research has also found that a paternal grandmother's support can influence how involved a young father is with his children, although, as Bunting & McCauly (2004, p. 302) state, "exploration of this issue within the UK context has been limited to date". This reflects prior research into young, non-resident fathers that found paternal grandparents helped young dads with emotional and practical support, as well as "grandmothers often instigating the first contact between the fathers and their children" (Speake, Cameron & Gilroy, 1997). And as Kalil, Ziol-Guest & Coley (2005) found:

...the paternal grandmother's acceptance of his paternity and feelings toward the child's mother played a significant role in pushing young fathers toward accepting their paternal role and responsibility (Ibid., p. 199).

Maternal grandparents – grandmothers in particular – have also be found to be important in a young father's relationship with his children, for example, Gavin et al, 2002 found that "fathers who feel welcomed by the child's maternal grandmother may be more involved in their child's care", and Herzog et al (2007, p. 246) found that the father was more involved with his children when the maternal grandmother had a positive attitude towards him.

While the scope of much of the research referenced above did not cover young fathers in prison, it is pertinent to the fifteen interviewees, many of whom talked about their own parents – or the parents of their partners – as important influences in their journey into fatherhood. Although Scott, 18, revealed he had "fallen out" with his mother at one stage and gone to live with his father, he had rebuilt the relationship and his mother was a source of support for him, not just for him in general but also in his role as a father. He described his mother as being "quite helpful" when he was learning

basic childcare tasks such as changing nappies after his son was born and now that he was in prison said she saw his son “every now and again”, which provided Scott with a link to him.

Father of two Simon, 20, praised both his own and his partner’s parents in their help and care of his two daughters. During his initial experiences with his first daughter Simon explained that his mum was “around a lot” helping him, as were his partner’s mother and father. Now, with two small children Simon’s parents found it more difficult to manage both but were still available and supportive, as he described:

[ANONYMISED] dad does [get involved], her dad um, is good and my mum and mum and dad do, got involved...They don’t really have them overnight or nothing like that like they did with the first but then because it’s two now it’s harder.

Expectant father Dan, 21, was comforted by the fact his pregnant partner was being supported by both her parents and his, who he described as “awesome parents”, as he was concerned about her wellbeing while he was in prison. He explained:

She’s got mum and dad, her mum and dad are separated but she live with her mum, um, her dad is supportive of her, she speaks to her dad reg, dad regularly, my, my dad and my mum are supportive to her as well which is important I think.

And as already discussed, expectant father Mo, 18, said his mother had been bonding with his pregnant girlfriend even though she had been a “bit angry” when she had first heard about the pregnancy.

Kamil, 21, had gained a lot of support from his partner’s parents, who had both been with them at the birth of his daughter, and were encouraging of his role as stepfather to his partner’s older child. He described his partner’s father as a “happy character” and an “amazing grandpa” who was loving having two granddaughters to look after and pamper. He laughingly described his stepdaughter as “very spoiled” and said when the baby had been born, “There was gifts off dad, her mum, her dad,

um, her nan, her grampy, her nan, her grampy". Kamil did not talk much about his own mother in this context but had previously mentioned that she had faced challenges with drug addiction.

Jake, 20, said his mother spent a lot of time with his son and looked after him regularly. She had been present at the birth and it was his mum who had taught him some of the practical childcare skills he needed after his son was born. In contrast, his partner's mum had not been around, and her father had passed away, but she had received a lot of care and support from her foster parents. Jonny, 18, said his mother was hoping to bring his son in on a visit, although she had a drug addiction and was now in recovery, so it was difficult for her, "Yeah, now that she's got off it all she's started working, she trying to do the best she can for her... but.... just hope that she sticks to it". Expectant father Asif, 17, claimed his mum had "brought me up real good" and he was fully anticipating she would have a role in his forthcoming child's life, "Yeah my mum, my mum's really good like that, she's always got my nephews and nieces over the house, yeah, yeah". While expectant dad Jamil, 17 said his mother was, "basically like a mother figure, she's two in one", playing on the construct of a 'father figure', continuing, "she's taught me a lot, she's taught me most respect, please and thank you, she's taught me everything, ain't she". When it came to the forthcoming baby Jamil said his mother was a "strong support" and would be there for him "100%", describing their relationship as follows:

She is an important person but we do fall out. But... with love it's not always 100% happy, you do fall out, you don't always get along. I just have that level of respect where you don't swear at her and never thought about putting any finger on my mum, I'm too scared, I'm too scared to yeah.

Christopher, 21, who had yet to see his son, had tried to arrange for his own mother to meet him, but as the child's mother was in prison did not think there was much point in the meeting. However, once the mother and child were out of prison, he said his mother was "ready to get in to meet him", and she was planning to bring the baby in for a prison visit.

For these interviewees, their own and their partner or ex-partner's parents were important influences and sources of support for their journeys into fatherhood. Both paternal and maternal grandparents were often cited as having given moral, emotional and even financial support and many of the interviewees were comforted by the fact their partners, or ex-partners, and their child or children, were receiving help and care from these family members. However, as discussed in [6.3 Getting on with mum](#), Seth, 19, had found maternal grandparents to be a barrier to him seeing his first child. His ex-partner's father was refusing to allow either Seth's ex-partner, or the child to visit him in prison, as Seth said, "He don't want the kid and his daughter coming to prison, it's nothing to do with him is it?.. He just don't like me". Although Seth said his own parents saw the child, they were evidently heeding his ex-partner's father and not bringing him in for visits. As mentioned previously, Seth was one of the least forthcoming of the interviewees and it was often difficult to ascertain certain details, particularly as on further questioning Seth tended to become monosyllabic or not answer at all. With this in mind it is difficult to work out the exact reasons why the baby was not allowed in to visit. However, this type of conflict with maternal grandparents has been noted in prior research into teenage parents, for example Bunting & McAuley, (2004) who found that teenage fathers often said they were, "treated with hostility or ignored by the maternal grandparents" (Ibid., p. 295), and Futris & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2007, who cited "discouraged visitation by maternal grandparents" as a barrier to teenage or young fathers maintaining relationships with their children (Ibid., p. 259). It has also been found that the mother receiving stronger support from the maternal grandmother is related to decreasing father involvement over time (Kalil, Ziol-Guest & Coley, 2005, p. 197).

For two of the interviewees their parents were not allowed to see their grandchildren for different reasons. As already discussed, Jordan's ex-partner would only allow his nan and "great nan" (participant's choice of terminology) to see his daughter, not his mother or father, thus the mother was proving to be a barrier to that relationship as well as to the relationship between Jordan and his daughter. Ryan, 21, said that Social Services had placed limitations on contact with his child for his

parents too. Ryan's experience was in contrast to that of Scott, 18, whose mother had seen his son, despite Scott only having indirect contact himself.

Thomas, 21, was also not able to see his daughter because of restrictions from Social Services.

However, the relationship with his ex-partners parents was a complex one. Firstly, they were her foster parents, secondly, they had "custody" (Thomas' own word) of the child. One of the reasons Thomas had gone to court to get his name on the birth certificate was that he was concerned the maternal grandparents would not allow him to see the child at all, as he explains:

They were asking for a Special Guardianship Order², and that got refused because I didn't, I contested it, saying that I wanted a local authority order, so, at the, if the, if they'd got a Special Guardianship Order then the parents would have made the decision whether I get to see her when I get out or not. And I've assaulted their daughter so I think you... they would swear to not let me see her due to that fact, so, I didn't like, I didn't like the situation.

For Thomas, the way to ensure he could see his daughter was follow the legal route, as the relationship with his ex-partner's parents was complicated and challenging. As discussed, for Thomas the most important relationship for him and his daughter was with Social Services.

6.7 FRIENDS AND FAMILY

"I dunno if I can trust them or not. With my mates I know that I can trust them", Jonny, 18

Although not as widely referenced as grandparents or parents, other family members of both young fathers and mothers had provided some support, stability and guidance in terms of becoming

² A Special Guardianship Order is an order appointing a person or persons to be a child's special guardian. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 provides the legal framework for special guardianship under the Children Act 1989. Section 115(1) of the 2002 Act inserted new sections 14A-F into the Children Act 1989.

parents. Some of the interviewees had regular visits from their siblings, including Scott, 18, Jordan, 21, and Jamil, 17, who said:

I got a little sister. I literally love her, like everything, she's spoiled, she's cute man. That's another person that I miss a lot. She came and visit me last week, she didn't want to leave.

However, while sibling visits may have boosted the interviewees' well-being, and many of the interviewees had talked about how looking after brothers and sisters had helped them learn practical parenting skills, they did not appear to do much to help them retain contact and communication with their children. None of the 15 interviewees discussed siblings helping bring children in for visits or being a significant link between father and child.

Members of the wider family unit, such as aunts and uncles, had also provided support for the young men, although not in such numbers as to prove significant. Dan, 21, said his aunt was "supportive" while Jonny 18, said his partner had a lot of help from her own aunts with their child:

Yeah, she got aunties. She always goes over to her aunt, erm her auntie... She spends most of her time there. She helps her out a lot.

Jonny had also had help from his own aunt while growing up, "I had an auntie and that, who use to help me but, uh, with, but mainly it was just me trying to do as much as I could". However, for the majority of the 15 interviewees their own parents and grandparents had provided the strongest support network. This research showed that the young man's relationships with both paternal and maternal grandparents were extremely important in aiding them to retain a link to their children while they were in prison. And for some of the 15 interviewees these relationships, if sour, could act as a barrier to contact and communications. Future policy around family work with young fathers in prison should therefore include relationships with wider family members, from both the young father's side and that of the mother of the child.

Friendships both with external friends and fellow prisoners provided further sources of support, for general wellbeing and in terms of fatherhood, for some of the interviewees. Jordan, 21, who had talked a lot about the team sports he used to play, had relied on his external friends when he was growing up, as he said, “My mates... We was always together, if one of us, if one of us was in trouble we’d all be there supporting them”. Jordan continued to use friendships inside prison as support during his sentence. He talked about chatting to other fathers on the wing and did not seem afraid to show them when he was emotionally vulnerable, recounting the following episode:

I woke up and I remembered it was her [daughter’s] birthday and obviously then I had a little cry in the room, the boys they go ‘what’s wrong’ and I told them what happened and then the boys are supportive of me, there are a couple of boys had problems in the past like that, so they’ve helped me through it like...Yeah, the boys are there to support in here. They know when I’m on a down because they know I’m normally loud and boisterous on the wing and they know I’m down because I’m sat in the corner of the room, quiet, puffing my pen and they’re like ‘what’s wrong’, and I tell them what’s wrong, and then some of the boys will go and then we just have the odd two or three in a room and have a chat like.

Jordan gained tremendous support from these relationships and was able to articulate his emotions about being separated from his daughter. Jordan’s experience ties in with research discussed in the literature review that showed some male prisoners find talking about their children therapeutic and a chance for them to be seen to be less aggressive in a hyper-masculine environment (Magaletta & Herbst, 2001).

While some of the interviewees discussed external friendships, such as Asif, 17, who felt that his friends on the outside were more like family, “Just me, me and my mates, just my mates I looked up to like my brothers”, there was a mixed response when I asked whether the young men spoke to other prisoners about being a father. Seth, 19, found it difficult to speak to anyone about his situation, saying, “Don’t speak to no one. No point is there”. Although he did admit to occasionally

speaking to his cell mate but did not go into detail about what those conversations consisted of. Jamil, 17, said he had talked to other prisoners about being an expectant father but that “it wouldn’t be the main topic”. As a resident of the young offender institute, he was one of only a handful of fathers or expectant fathers and said he did not talk about the pregnancy much because, “Not everyone is mature in there to be honest”. He was also concerned other prisoners may use the information against him in some way, although did not elaborate on what that might entail.

Thomas, 21, said he spoke to a couple of other prisoners about their children noting that he had seen how difficult it was for them when their child visited and they had to say goodbye. Dan, 21, had found comfort from his cell mate, “I openly speak about it like. My, the cell mate I just moved in with now, to be fair, he’s been uh, he’s got, he’s got kids himself like and he’s explained like, he’s given me a talking to”. Lester, 20, talked to his cell mate, but did not like to be too intrusive with other prisoners as the following exchange shows:

Do you talk to other lads on the landing about being a dad or?

No not really, the only person I really talk about it is my pad [cell] mate, you know what I’m saying yeah?

Has he got kids?

No, he ain’t got kids no, no.

Would you know if anybody else um, sort of your age on the landing has got kids or you just don’t know?

Yeah, somes of, a couple of them’s got kids on there, yeah, to be fair yeah, they do, but I don’t really get deep into it you know what I’m saying because you never know how somebody’s feeling or, stuff like that but, yeah, I do say, fam, or is your family alright stuff, you know what

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I mean like, those little conversations, oh your family alright stuff like that, yeah man my family is alright so, yeah?

Christopher, 20, said he spoke about his child to his cell mate and co-defendants who were also in the same prison. While Scott, 18, had found a father's group at a previous establishment particularly useful as he had been able to talk about being a father and discuss ways forward. For more information on this see [5.4 Alternatives to being there](#). He also used this strategy in his current prison:

There, there's, um, a couple of lads on, on the, this wing I'm on and I'll speak to them because obviously they have children that are slightly older than my son so I'd ask them like, if I needed to chat with them about things, I could turn to them. And like my pad mate, he's, he's obviously a YO [young offender] and um, so me and him have the chat and that about sorta like our kids and that.

Several of the interviewees admitted they did not talk to other prisoners or prison staff at all for a variety of reasons. For example, Jonny, 18, admitted that he found it hard to trust prisoners or staff, preferring to confide in friends outside prison. When asked if he found it easy to talk about his children he said:

It's... with my mates it's alright, but like I've been with them most of my life, I've grown up with them and that but with the officers and that it is, it is quite hard because with officers here now you don't know if they're gonna be mocking you and you, if they just laughing behind your back or...

Or you don't know if you can trust them, is that it? Yeah?

Yeah. I dunno if I can trust them or not. With my mates I know that I can trust them.

Simon, 20, found it difficult to talk to other prisoners about being a father, saying “I keep it all in really”. While Mo, 18, admitted that he didn’t speak to the other prisoners about being an expectant father as he did not want to “look soft” on the wing as this exchange shows:

D’you know anybody else who’s a dad or...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, definitely, what in jail yeah? Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

But you just don’t... you just don’t talk about it?

Yeah, yeah, it’s just yeah, I look soft when I speak about it.

You what?

I look soft when I speak about it [Laughs].

Ah, is that what it is?

Yeah, yeah [Laughs].

You don’t wanna look soft in front of the other lads?

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Note how Mo’s experiences tie in with the literature that suggests some male prisoners don’t like to discuss their children within the hyper-masculine prison environment (Nurse, 2002).

Jake, 20 also admitted he found it difficult to trust other prisoners saying, “Everyone’s in it for themselves”. While Ryan, 21, said he did talk to other prisoners but “nothing about family like”. Kamil, 21, tried to keep conversations about his children “separate” from other prisoners, but said:

There’s certain people that you can, like there’s a couple of people in there that have got children as young as me, but not many, not many erm, prisoners have got children at my age.

Asif, 17, said he would talk to his friends on the outside, "On the out I'll probably, I would talk to people innit, but not in here, you just don't know who to trust in here, no one defends [you]". I was surprised to learn from Asif that I was the first person he had spoken to at length about his ex-partner's pregnancy, saying, "This is the only time that I've actually spoke about it". Similarly, Mo, 18, also revealed that I was the first person he had really confided in about his forthcoming child and that it had been a "relief" to talk about it, saying, "It was nice to get it off all my chest 'cos I just been thinking about it every day since I been in here". It is not unusual for this cohort to lack a supportive framework. According to research into adolescent and teenage pregnancies, there is a suggestion that "a substantial minority of young men may not receive support from their families and that professional support and service provision is very limited" (Bunting & McAuley, 2005, p. 295).

Although most of the interviewees had some level of support, whether from a partner, parent, or other prisoners, for some of the interviewees more support, particularly around relationship skills, could benefit them both in terms of life after prison, but also in their lifelong commitments as fathers. Although perhaps not as integral to the young men's experiences of fatherhood in prison as partners, ex-partners and family members, friendships outside and inside prison did support some of the young men in some ways. It was clear that several of the interviewees found it difficult to trust other people, particularly other prisoners, and were unwilling to allow themselves to show any emotional vulnerability, or to "look soft". However, those that did talk to others about being a father appeared to gain significant comfort and support from the interactions.

6.8 CONCLUSION TO THIS CHAPTER

Despite the recognition that family and community ties are important, it seems reasonable to suggest that little has been done to create environments across the UK prison estate where maintaining these ties is the norm. It could be argued that maintaining external relationships has not been a priority for the UK prison service and any efforts, particularly with physical visits, are often hampered by logistics,

funding and costs, staffing levels and other resources (Mills, 2005). Equally, many prisoners are already experiencing damaged or non-existent relationships before they enter prison, so the challenge isn't always to maintain them, but to build or rebuild them from scratch (La Vigne et al., 2005). Nevertheless, despite the difficulties inherent in maintaining relationships while in prison, external – and to a lesser extent internal – relationships was a dominant theme among the interviewees. The reports by Lords Woolf and Farmer (Woolf & Tumim, 1991; Farmer, 2017) into family and community ties have shown that strong and stable associations and friendships can improve the likelihood of a prisoner not reoffending on release. Debates about reform and rehabilitation are beyond the scope of this research project, yet for the young men in the study it became apparent that the quality of their external relationships was closely linked to whether, and how well, they managed to maintain contact and communication with their child or children while in prison.

These relationships, familial or otherwise, affected how the young men in this study experienced being a father. They affected contact with their child or children whether through physical visits or phone and mail communications and they affected how the young men were supported as fathers while in prison. While the relationship with the mother of the child or children appears to be the most important, it can be argued that other relationships, including with grandparents, maternal and paternal grandparents, friends, and, perhaps surprisingly, Social Services, are also crucial. Good relationships meant increased contact and communication with their children. Poor relationships meant some of the young men had no contact with their children at all, and for some, a slim chance of ever getting it. What this data also shows is that, for this cohort, the narratives paint a very complex picture of 'family'.

I would suggest that future work with imprisoned young fathers should look at relationships through the perspective of the prisoner, not just the perspective of the family, particularly when developing policies on family work. Interactions should concentrate on helping young men to build and maintain

strong relationships with not only the mother of their child or children, but also their wider family, social network and State bodies, such as Social Services. It should be recognised that family aren't always blood relations and that many young men need help to develop relationship skills, conflict management and resolution techniques. Concentrating on the relationship between father and child, rather than the one between father and mother could also see huge benefits derived from successful 'co-parenting' initiatives. Positive, supportive relationships are vital to enable young fathers in prison to develop and maintain contact with their children. Without them, these young men are destined to fail at fatherhood.

CHAPTER 7: LIMITING FATHERHOOD

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I examine the factors that, it could be argued, limit the ability of the young men in this study to father from prison. This is not to say that I believe if these limitations were lifted that these men would achieve some true state of fatherhood. As I have already argued, there is no one definition of fatherhood. Instead the use of the term 'limiting' is intended to show the barriers these young men face in order to build any type of relationship or connection with their children. While these initially seemed to be external factors placed on the young fathers, for example the physical barriers raised by the prison itself, the restrictions around visiting and communicating with family and friends, and the denial of liberty, it became clear from the interviews that some of these external barriers could be overcome, or at least circumvented, depending on how the individual interviewee reacted to them. Thus, this chapter sees an examination not just of the external factors to limiting fatherhood, but the internal ones too.

I start by examining the pains of imprisonment, that is the emotional and psychological pains often experienced by those within the prison system, and look at any coping mechanisms the young men

exhibited in an attempt to overcome, live with or, indeed, ignore these pains. I then look at their experiences with the visiting regimen and examine how this has helped or hindered their ability to maintain relationships with their children, or for those expectant fathers, with the expectant mothers of their children. This is followed by an analysis of the interviewees' interactions and relationship with Social Services, a State body that all the young men I spoke to had encountered in one form or another. Finally, I examine their experiences with the law, from their interactions with the police and individual court cases through to sentencing, and analyse whether their individual journeys through the criminal justice system have impacted their fathering journeys. In each of these sections I look first at the assumed limitations and their effect on fathering, then at how the interviewees either appear to accept these limitations or have found ways to manage or overcome them. In conclusion I suggest ways in which instruments of the State, such as the prison system and Social Services, as well as the young men themselves could lower these barriers to fatherhood, thus allowing these young men, and those who follow in their wake, to build and maintain stronger relationships with their children.

7.2 PAINS OF IMPRISONMENT

"It's tough being in here... Tougher than I expected." Jonny, 18

Sykes' now classic analysis of life within a maximum-security prison, *The Society of Captives* (Sykes, 1958) defined five 'pains of imprisonment'. These pains were not the physical pains of prior punishment systems, but psychological pains, described as the loss of liberty, desirable goods and services, heterosexual relationships, autonomy, and security (Ibid.; Shammass, 2017). As Sykes claimed, "The destruction of the psyche is no less fearful than bodily affliction" (Sykes, 1958, p. 58), and, according to Sykes, "the sum total of these deprivations explained why inmates found prison life undesirable" (Sykes, 1958).

While some have argued that modern penal systems have added new pains of imprisonment or have examined Sykes' original quintet through the lens of masculinity or gendered experiences of imprisonment (see Crewe, 2011; Ugelik, 2014; Shamma 2017), few have argued that Sykes' pains of imprisonment no longer hold true. In fact, they are often cited as the base from which subsequent studies into the sociology of prisons have grown. With this in mind I have used Sykes' expression 'pains of imprisonment' to examine where the very fact of being in prison and the psychological pains that ensue can be seen to limit fatherhood for the cohort in this study.

As well as Sykes' five pains, prior research suggests that fathers experience additional deprivation strains during imprisonment to non-fathers. For example, in their study of pre-trial fathers and non-fathers in The Netherlands, Reef & Dirkzwager (2019) found that fathers scored highly in certain deprivation strains, including missing intimacy and missing home, compared to non-fathers, as they explained:

The study revealed that fathers and non-fathers show differences in adjustment patterns in prison and experience different 'pains of imprisonment'. We found that fathers' unique deprivation strain of missing children causes anxiety and depressive problems during pretrial detention (Ibid. p. 1664).

In addition, Ugelik's 2014 study of ethnic minority fathers in Norwegian prisons argued that Sykes' list was not exhaustive, and that there were father-specific pains of imprisonment and, in consequence, father-specific solutions to these pains. Ugelik examined the prison system through the lens of masculinity, arguing that pains of imprisonment create challenges to a male prisoner's masculinity, which, "in turn relates to some masculinity challenges that are directly connected to fatherhood and prisoners' failure to live up to the standards of 'good fathers'" (Ugelik, 2014 p. 155). For Ugelik's study this led to two father-specific solutions to these pains: firstly, to criticise Norwegian society's normative parenting narrative, that is the assumed 'standards' of good fathers, and secondly to exhibit "active, violent resistance" towards the prison system and thus to the State itself. These are

both pertinent points but neither had any real traction in this study. There is a rich body of research into masculinity and prisons, which is outside the scope of this research these. For more information on masculinities in prison see the work of Collier (1998), Messerschmidt (2001), and Sabo, Kupers & London (2001). It might also be useful to examine the interviewees' responses to pains of imprisonment through the framework of hegemonic masculinity, particularly when it comes to their emotional responses and use of therapeutic language (see Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2019). However, that is out of scope of this study.

None of the interviewees criticised societal norms of parenting in an attempt to rationalise their inability to fulfil these norms. In fact, many of them cited dominant ideologies about fathers, such as the concept of 'being there', which coheres with the modern model of fatherhood as being emotionally and physically available to their children, and, to varying degrees, with an acceptance of a sense of responsibility. The data shows these young men did not rail against those societal norms, but rather felt that being able to care, even if they could not do this physically, was not something the prison system could deprive them of. There was also little expression of violent resistance towards the State, with only Ryan, 21, showing any anger towards Social Services. Seth, 19, did express anger at his ex-partner's father for not allowing contact, but I would not say this resulted in "active, violent resistance". While I would agree with Ugelik's assumption that fathers experience additional pains of imprisonment to non-fathers, I would argue that the young men in this study appeared to have developed a certain apathy as a solution to their pains, rather than any marked criticism of or anger towards the State.

Sykes' pains suggest that the psychological and emotional effects of prison are as painful as physical punishments, and it was clear that these young men found being in prison tough emotionally. This affected them not just as young men but as fathers too. While they may not have articulated these emotional challenges in terms of 'pains' many of the interviewees discussed how difficult they found being in the prison environment and were quite open in expressing these difficulties. For example,

father of two Simon, 20, talked about how hard he found being inside and how he missed his children, saying:

The hardest thing it's just like... at nights when you're... it's like. Through the day it's a bit, it's easy, but when you're at night and you think back like, you should be with your family and stuff it gets you upset, well like it gets me upset anyway. Well I just think I should be there at nights with 'em. I do, I, I, do miss them terribly because I was always there as well all the time like, it is hard for me. I can see, I can see other dads is not like, and I don't think it affects some dads like it affects me like know what I mean like? Just missing them you know, I think to myself, I shouldn't be in here and getting myself down 'cos like, I keep telling, telling myself I should be out there with my kids all the time d'you know what I mean. That's the hardest, that's the hardest part I think.

This clearly shows the psychological impact being removed from his children has had on Simon.

Although at times he hesitated and faltered over his words, he felt able to talk about his children and how he maintained an emotional connection with them by looking at photographs:

I've got pictures and all stuff like that like on their birthdays. Stuff like, for the third birthdays I've got like pictures of them and all. So yeah, I used to put... She sends me like a few every month or whatever, I used to put them on my wall but then like I damaged them so you know, I think like, I'll just keep 'em, in my little file like.

You damaged them?

Yeah, like because obviously I'd like stuck them on my wall with like, like um toothpaste and it ruins them like, so now I just keep them in a big pile and I look through them every now and then like.

Note how Simon talks about using toothpaste to stick pictures to his cell wall, as items like Sellotape or Blu-Tack are considered contraband in prisons (PrisonUK: An Insider's View, 2014) as are,

presumably, items like glass photo frames. This strikes a chord with Sykes' pain of deprivation of goods and services. Even something as small as being allowed Sellotape has been taken away as part of their prison punishment. And for Simon, this had a direct effect on his emotional connection with his children. Seeing his children's pictures enabled him to feel closer to them, yet he had to keep them in a file rather than display them on his wall.

Father of one Jordan, 21, who had been denied contact with his daughter by his ex-partner, also talked at length about his emotional state. He explained that he found being a father in prison and unable to have any contact with his child tough, saying:

'Cos obviously all the boys on the wing are talking about their daughters, coming in and seeing them and holding them and like, it gets me down.

Whereas Simon had talked about other prison fathers perhaps not feeling the same emotions he felt, here Jordan discusses how the fathering experiences of other men in prison highlighted his particular emotional pain. Jordan talked about "having a little cry" in his cell on his daughter's birthday, and also explained how upset he'd been on not recognising his child in a photograph:

I had a photo of her obviously in my arms when she was first born, and then a year later on her first birthday and I looked at the picture and I was like, who's that, so I rang my mam and I said who's that, whose kid you've sent me in, she goes it's yours, and I was like, shit and I started crying because I didn't recognise her like.

This highlights a particular pain of imprisonment for fathers who do not have contact with their children. Over the space of a year Jordan's daughter had changed so much that he did not recognise her. It is unsurprising that this should invoke an emotional response. As discussed in [6.7 Friends and family](#), Jordan dealt with these feelings by talking to other men on his wing.

Other interviewees also talked about the emotional pains of imprisonment. Kamil, 21, discussed feelings of anxiety and said that he found it, "hard though to keep a strong head" after receiving

letters and drawings from his stepdaughter. Christopher, 21, admitted to finding prison life stressful because he was removed from his family, saying, "But erm, I am, I'm finding it hard here, because I can't bond with my family..." But he admitted that talking about his feelings was better than bottling them up:

Yeah, there's... there's nothing to hide, it's better to be open than let it build up inside you because that's when there is problems occurring.

While expectant father Dan, 21, suggested some counselling or psychological help in prison would be beneficial:

But like, for me, myself, and, the stress I'm going through, being in here and being away from [ANONYMISED] while she's out there being pregnant like, maybe there could be, I dunno, maybe someone coming in and just having a chat or something every month or so or something like that maybe, just a, just to help the psychol... my psychology with, with regards to worrying and stuff like that, but yeah.

Dan's comments reflect a need in prisons for improved mental health care. It is acknowledged that mental health treatment in prisons is an issue (Forrester et al., 2018). A 2017 report from the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts claimed the level of self-inflicted deaths and self-harm in prisons "appalling" and stated attempts to improve the mental health of prisoners "isn't working as it should" (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2017, p. 3). The Committee's report also showed that:

The Ministry of Justice was not able to tell us the percentage of those currently in prison who have mental health issues. The only figures it has are from a survey 10 years ago which showed that around 50% of prisoners were prone to anxiety, which has not been updated.
(Ibid.).

While a full examination of the mental health of prisoners is out of scope of this study, what this does show is that there is yet another absence of information in the prison environment. Forrester et al., (2018) suggest that increasing mental health treatment in prison would, “ensure gains on a public health scale” (p. 107) as the prison environment:

...offers an opportunity to engage with a group of people who are socially disadvantaged, often engage poorly with healthcare services in the community, and exhibit relatively poor health outcomes (Ibid.).

In other words, engaging prisoners in mental health treatment while they are in prison could be beneficial to them and public health in the longer term. I would also argue that this could be of particular use to the men in this study, who, as Dan suggested, could benefit from some kind of counselling or psychological support. It is also pertinent to note here that Covid-19 and the increased focus on isolation in prisons could have a catastrophic effect on prisoners’ mental health, which will only come to light over the next few years as the damage is assessed (Stewart, Cossar & Stoové, 2020, p. 1227).

Scott, 18, found prison difficult as a father because of the time available to think:

Er, because obviously once you’re in here you have nothing but time to think and if you find yourself constantly thinking about your child it can cause you to be depressed and stuff, and it’s, it’s not good.

While Jonny admitted that he “bottled his emotions up” and that he was finding prison a lot tougher than he expected, emotionally. Father of one Ryan, 21, was the only interviewee who became visibly upset when talking about being a father in prison. Unable to have any contact with his son due to restrictions from Social Services, he said:

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It's upsetting, I, I, I, I like to think of myself as a strong person, but as soon as it comes to my son, nah, I get so emotional, talk about it and then, basically, blanking me off completely, oh it's hard.

During the interview Ryan became tearful when talking about his son, saying:

He's always been my number one priority. And then, as soon as they've taken that away from me they've, they've took everything... [Interviewee becomes tearful].

I offered at this point to pause or stop the interview and the recording, but Ryan composed himself and said he was happy to continue. He went on to explain that his current prison sentence had really drained him emotionally:

I, I, when I, when I got out last time I really tried, I got myself into work, I got myself privately, uh, privately rented accommodation, so everything I was funding for myself I was saving for myself, plus the pot [of money] for my son and when I came in this time, it's, took everything away from me again. It's, like killed me inside. It's like knocked me back down, right down to square one, right back down to rock bottom. And that, I don't even know how to pick myself up from it.

Shammas, 2017, argued that the pains of imprisonment as outlined by Sykes are counterintuitive to the rehabilitation of prisoners. I would also argue that these deprivations are counterintuitive to fatherhood. It has already been established that imprisonment is destructive to father involvement (Dallaire 2007; Dennison et al., 2014; Lansky et al., 2016) and for these young fathers the pains of imprisonment appeared to invoke feelings of stress and anxiety, particularly about their father status.

From a policy point of view, it seems pertinent here to focus on building trust with young fathers in prison, many of whom will have already felt let down by instruments of the State and helping them to cope with their emotions and be more proactive about fathering. I also note that research from Fagan

& Kupchik found that youths held in juvenile facilities in the USA suffered fewer pains of imprisonment than those held in adult facilities, although they found that:

Youth in juvenile facilities are still exposed to harsh conditions likely to exacerbate social, academic, and emotional deficiencies, and thus any incarceration ought to be used only as a last resort sentencing option (Fagan & Kupchick, 2011, p. 1).

This could be a point of recommendation for young fathers in prison. Would they be better served in the more psychologically aware environs of youth facilities rather than the larger and potentially more aggressive adult prisons, where their needs are likely to get lost?

7.3 ASKING FOR HELP AND SUPPORT

Don't speak to no one, no point is there? Seth, 19

I found the young men's willingness to discuss their emotions provided an antithesis to the narrative of them being uncaring, feckless youths (Ladlow & Neale, 2016). Reasons for their openness could be due to the demographics of the cohort as they are of a generation perceived to be more 'in touch' with its mental health and more aware of mental health issues (Shraer, 2019). It might also have been the interview environment where they felt comfortable talking to an older woman who was asking them questions about personal matters. Yet despite this openness there was little appetite for these young men to ask for help and support from the prison or Social Services, often citing that they didn't know what help there was or that they did not want to ask for it. This could be help with their mental health, or help getting contact with their children. I would argue that this inability to ask for help could be construed as a self-imposed limitation on their ability to father from prison.

For example, when discussing contact with his son Seth, 19, admitted simultaneously that he didn't know how to get contact, but also that no one in the prison system would help him, saying, "I don't

know how to do it [get contact] they don't help you with nothing in here". Seth also admitted that he didn't speak to anyone about his situation as there was "no point". Not only did some of the interviewees think there was no help available, but they also felt there was nothing that could be done to help them. For example, when I asked a specific question about whether there was anything the prison system could do to help, for many, the answer was nothing. Expectant father Asif, 17, said:

Erm, no nothing jail can really do to change anything for me to be honest, I just wanna get my time, get out, that's what I wanna do. Yeah.

Also, Jordan, 21, said there was nothing they could do to help.

Honestly, there's not much they can do really is there? It's all, like obviously I gotta go out now and get it all myself haven't I?

I would argue this idea that there is no help available suggests that perhaps these young men felt they did not deserve help, or that they were attempting to come across as more responsible, as Jordan says, "I gotta go out now and get it all myself haven't I?". My interpretation of the interview data was that there appeared to be an assumption there was no help available, and that many of the interviewees believed they had to do it all themselves.

Ryan, 21, provided a unique take on the lack of help and support and was the only participant who felt he was not getting any help because he was a father. The following exchange echoes the narrative from some father's rights movements, with Ryan stating he received no help because he was a father.

No, no one helps. I, I've not had any help whatsoever. I've tried contacting Services, Social Services, to find out in what sense, what do they ask, what do they ask for you know? As a father, what they expect from me. Oh, we can't say that, oh you gotta go through court, go through court for contact. And that's it. Basically, being a father they've shut me out.

This concept of gender bias has been widely noted in contact disputes (see Kaganas & Sclater, 2004, p. 16) although it has been raised by both mothers and fathers in such disputes, with mothers also complaining that courts “pander to the man’s rights” (Ibid.). While Ryan does not specifically mention the mother of his child here, in fact later in the interview he says he does not “blame” her for his situation, he does expressly suggest that the lack of help is because he is a father and is being shut out.

In contrast, Scott, 18, was not so sure nothing could be done, and seemed to feel that he had been helped:

Not really sure. Although obviously my, my time in prison is like, they’ve offered me what they can sort of thing, they, they have like, they do try their hardest and stuff. And so, in my opinion they’re doing what they can do for dads in prison. To help them see their children and stuff.

I look at Scott’s interactions with Social Services and how they had helped him maintain contact with his son in [7.5 The Social](#), and he clearly had a different perspective to other interviewees who had not had, asked for, or accepted this help. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly why these men did not ask for help. As aforementioned, it could be that they did not feel they deserved help, or that they were attempting to be responsible and felt they needed to do everything themselves. Equally, as I will show in [7.5 The Social](#) and [7.6 The Law](#), for many of the interviewees, their experiences with instruments of the State, such as Social Services or within the criminal justice system, were far from positive, so it is unsurprising that they were unwilling to turn to these very same organisations for help.

As well as a reluctance to seek help, there was also an unwillingness among the interviewees to learn more about parenting while they were in prison. This seemed to be from a lack of interest, a belief there was nothing they could learn, a lack of knowledge of parenting training programmes, or experience with previous programmes that they had not found useful. This aligns with research from the USA that suggests that fathers have been largely left out of the equation when it comes to

parenting education in prison (Bushfield, 2004, p. 105). However, there is a growing body of evidence that parenting education in prison does have benefits (Hairston, 1998; Bushfield, 2004; Meek, 2007).

Meek's study into parenting programmes with young offenders found:

The findings support arguments for providing parenting education for young fathers in prison whilst illustrating the effectiveness of targeting such a particularly vulnerable and marginalized group of parents during their time in custody (Meek, 2007, p. 244).

However, the report also showed that participants felt:

The best form of parenting support they could receive whilst in prison was help with maintaining contact with their children and families, with 75% of respondents emphasizing the need for longer, more frequent or less disturbed visits with their children (Ibid. p. 245).

I will look at this theme in [7.4 Visiting time](#), but Meek's research tallies with this study, in that the participants did not seem particularly interested in parenting classes but were more interested in contact with their children. It is pertinent to note here that while there is growing research that parenting programmes can be beneficial, this did not align with the lived experiences of the participants in this study.

For example, Jake, 20, was not interested in parenting classes or help, saying, "Don't really, wanna... I don't really need to do 'em, no". While Seth, 19, said he might consider a class, but he knew about parenting already, "I don't do that. I knows it all yeah, but I would do it. I know how to be a dad".

Thomas, 21, didn't think he was eligible for any training programmes as he didn't have contact with his daughter, while Simon, 20, had done a course while in a young offender institute which he admitted he had been forced to attend as part of his sentence and had not found of much use.

Expectant father Mo, 18, had also not done any courses or been offered any, but would be interested if they were offered, and Ryan, 21, said he had been asked to do classes but "nothing ever come [sic]

up". These answers could be interpreted as a general apathy towards parenting classes, or an assumption that there was nothing they could learn.

Other interviewees were more positive about their need for parenting education, yet none had done any. Christopher, 21, had been scheduled to go on a course but had moved prisons, although he would be keen to do any future courses available:

I think I probably will do one before I get out because there's obviously things I need to learn as well and I'm happy and open to learn new things. 'Cos it's not just gonna benefit me it's gonna benefit him as well and her, and my family, so, it's a good thing to do.

Lester, 20, had not heard about any parenting classes but claimed he would be interested:

I've not heard of it yet but, if it comes to it then I would. I would take every chance I get, you know what I'm saying, I'll grab it and I'll take it, it's an opportunity really, yeah, so, yeah I would.

Dan, 21, had not done any classes but had proactively contacted family support services within the prison.

Yeah, so then, when, I haven't done anything in the form of classes or course on family but, I've been in contact with the, um, what is, is the family support, or the, about when the baby's due and what that...

Jamil, 17, had not done any parenting courses but was also happy to do them:

Why not. I'm not perfect. I could, I've got lots more learning to do. So I wouldn't mind, literally. Put some more things in my, on my belt that I know what to do. Literally. I'm willing to learn anything, just to make the mum and the baby proud. She says she doesn't want me to be back in here no more. She ain't proud of that right now, so, yeah.

Asif, 17, had not been on any courses and knew he would have things to learn:

It's a couple of things I do need to learn, but it's all in due time and erm, eventually I am gonna learn that before I'm out anyway.

While Jordan, 21, despite being on a family focused wing, had not undertaken any classes:

Have you done any of the parenting programmes or anything there yet?

I said I would like to do one but that was when they said I couldn't see her now, I said I'd like to learn obviously how to be, more stuff about the baby and how to do more stuff with her and that, I said I'd give it a try like I said to them, obviously waiting for them to start now, so...

OK, so you've said you like to do them. And have you done anything else like any other classes or stuff since you've been in here?

No.

While all of these responses suggest at least a willingness to take a class the fact they had not done so, because they had not been offered a place or circumstances had not allowed it, is telling. Even when these young men appeared to show an interest there was no outlet for them to pursue that interest.

Scott, 18, had taken part in Storybook Dads, a scheme whereby imprisoned fathers can record themselves reading stories to their children, which are then produced on a CD so that child can hear their father talking to them. While not specifically an educational course, it was a parenting programme of sorts. He was the only interviewee who talked about taking part in the scheme or similar schemes. Scott had also been part of a 'father's group' while in a secure centre, which he had found useful. While Kamil, 21, had done a course in a prior establishment but couldn't remember what it was:

It was. It was OK. It was learning the basics of the value of being a dad, and like how it affects, it doesn't just affect you, it affects, like, I'm in prison, and it's not me just doing the time, it's

my girlfriend doing the time, my... it's other people it affects too like my nan's doing, like how can I say it, suffering, girlfriend's suffering, they're not just doing prison, they're doing... I'm looking for a word...

While research suggests that young fathers in general do not receive any professional support when it came to parenting (Speake, Cameron & Gilroy, 1997; Future Men, 2017), and that the deprivation of support programs and services form a barrier to the continuation of father-child relationships (Bartlett & Eriksson, 2018), it seems as if these young fathers in prison did not have access to similar courses, did have access but didn't know about them or didn't think they were applicable to them. This reluctance to engage could be part of what appeared to be a collective apathy, characterised by the frequent use of the term "it is what it is" in the interviews. This idiomatic term is described by Dictionary.com as, "an expression used to characterise a frustrating or challenging situation that a person believes cannot be changed and must just be accepted" (Dictionary.com, n.d.). While it can be argued that the phrase is simply common parlance for the demographic of the interviewees, I would also suggest that for these young men it was a response to their pains of imprisonment, and represented the fact they felt powerless, and that there was nothing they could do to change their situations as fathers in prison. While in some respects this was true – now they were in prison they had little choice about being there – some of the men seemed to be in a kind of self-imposed stasis, waiting until their sentence was over before they did anything, such as seeing their children, or investigating legal pathways to contact. This may be because they were unwilling to do anything, were experiencing a kind of apathy, or simply that they did not know what they could do while in prison. Equally it can be argued that some of these young men were simply doing their time, keeping their heads down and getting through their prison sentences as best they could. I would suggest that in some respects the 'it is what it is' phrase is linked with the concept of individual responsibility. There is an idea that young fathers are not responsible, by siring children in the first place and then abandoning them. For young fathers in prison the concept of a lack of responsibility is heightened. It

is, one could argue, not responsible to commit crimes when you are a father and have a child to look after. The term 'it is what it is' could feed into the narrative of the deadbeat dad, the irresponsible, feckless youth, shrugging off their parental responsibilities and refusing to do anything to change. Yet there is research that shows that apathy can be the "end result of deprivation when it reaches traumatic proportions" (Greenson, 1949, p. 282). While Greenson's research was among prisoners of war it is pertinent to these young men's situations. Whereas Ugelik found that the fathers in his research turned to anger as a response to the pains of imprisonment, the young men in this study appeared to use apathy as a coping mechanism. As Greenson states:

Prisoners of war described initial reactions of belligerence, rebelliousness and aggressiveness; however, when angry rebellion and aggression brought continual defeat and humiliation, it would subside and apathy would gradually come into the foreground (Greenson, 1949, p. 292).

Examining those interviewees who did use the phrase opens up some of the potential reasons behind it. For example, Thomas, 21, who had been to court to get his name added to his daughter's birth certificate so he could gain some elements of parental responsibility, clearly was not shirking his responsibilities and had actively gone through legal proceedings while in prison. Yet, when discussing the relationship with his ex-partner, and the restraining order he had against him, even though he claimed his ex-partner still wanted to see him, he said, "It is what it is innit? I can't do fuck all about it". Here then was a legal restriction that Thomas felt he could do nothing about. For him there was little point in trying to appeal the restraining order, and perhaps more importantly in this context, jeopardising any future contact with his daughter, therefore he had accepted the situation.

For Seth, 19, his use of the term was quite contradictory. When asked about whether he found being a father in prison stressful, Seth said, "I don't get stressed all the time. Myself it's my kid innit. It is what it is", suggesting that he had accepted his situation and there was little he could do about it. However, earlier in the interview Seth admitted that his ex-partner's father had stopped her and the

baby coming in to visit him, a situation he said, “stresses me out”. When I asked if there was any way he could appeal this, he said, “No, they don’t do nothing. It’s stupid”. While this may look like Seth’s ability to see his son was being hampered by prison authorities, he went on to say that he, “don’t like speaking to any of ‘em [prison staff] to be honest”. Seth evidently felt there were external factors preventing visits from his ex-partner and his son, yet he admitted he didn’t know what to do and he had refused to talk to any of the prison staff to find out if there was anything he could do about the situation. This combination of external factors outside Seth’s control - his ex-partner’s father stopping visits and his self-imposed inability to ask for help when he needed it – made any limitations seem insurmountable.

Lester, 20, had also self-imposed his own limits by deciding to wait until he was out of prison before seeking any contact with his son. When asked if there was anything he could do while in prison, or anything he thought would help his situation he said, “Well, pfft. I’m in prison, I can’t really do much, you know what I’m saying like”. Clearly for Lester, his prison sentence had effectively placed a full stop on his ability to physically be a father. However, comments in Lester’s interview pointed to other situations where he seemed to not take responsibility for his actions. On not going to the birth of his son he said:

I didn’t find out you know what I mean? I found out from a friend. So by the time I found out from a friend yeah? He was already been born and that so, there was a bit of disappointment there but, I couldn’t have done anything about it.

Without knowing the full situation, it seems as if Lester simply accepted events he felt he could do nothing about. But this begs the question, were those events really outside his control or did he need to take more responsibility?

Expectant father Asif, 17, also used a version of the ‘it is what it is’ phrase when explaining how he felt when he found out he was going to be a father. On hearing the news, he said, “[I] just had to take it,

innit, it's my responsibility, yeah", adding later, "Nothing I can really do". Here I would suggest that, while Asif accepts the pregnancy is his responsibility, he also acknowledges there is nothing he can do about it, suggesting a sense of powerlessness. As discussed in [Chapter 4: Becoming a dad](#), there was no mention or discussion about abortion, or adoption or other ways in which the child could be raised, although I did not ask a specific question about these matters. What Asif's comments suggest is that he accepted the responsibility of the pregnancy but did not really know or understand what this might mean.

When I asked Asif whether he had spoken to anyone about becoming a father he admitted that he didn't speak to anyone inside the prison about it as he didn't know who he could trust. He disclosed that my interview was the first time he'd spoken about it, as the following exchange shows:

Yeah. This is the only time that I've actually spoke about it.

Here? Now?

Yeah.

Oh, thank you, thank you, I feel quite privileged that you're happy to talk.

Yeah.

So you don't talk to any of the other lads on the wing or anything like that?

No. I don't talk to no one. They know I'm having a baby that's all it is, they know I'm having a baby, I don't tell 'em nothing.

Is it better to keep it in?

Yeah. On the out[side] I'll probably, I would talk to people innit, but not in here, you just don't know who to trust in here, no one defends...

Mo, 18, who had a much stronger relationship with his partner than Asif did with the pregnant mother, appeared to have accepted his lot as an expectant father in prison. When asked how he felt about not being able to be at the birth of his child, he said, "So... yeah, it's a bit, yeah, it's a bit shit like, yeah, it is what it is innit. It is what it is". without discussing any ideas or thoughts he had about seeing the baby, or even whether he'd inquired if he'd be allowed out on compassionate leave to attend the birth.

Jake, 20, used the phrase 'it is what it is' several times in his interview, appearing at first to almost shrug off his situation. When I asked him about the responsibilities of fatherhood he said, "But it's a lot of responsibilities really innit? It's mainly not to go to prison. It is what it is". This suggests Jake felt one of the biggest responsibilities about being a father was not coming into prison, but now that he was there, there was not a lot he could do about it. Later in the interview when discussing life inside the prison, Jake said:

Everyone's in it for themselves.

Themselves, yeah?

Yeah, jail, innit [laughs]

Yeah, can't trust anyone?

No, it is what it is, innit. It's a learning curve.

Again, suggesting that he just had to accept his fate as a prisoner. This was echoed at the end of the interview, when Jake spoke about the view from his cell window, "It's just more cells [laughs]. It's horrible. It is what it is though, innit?" Once again suggesting he was simply accepting his fate and doing his time.

It is challenging to ascertain whether the use of 'it is what it is' or similar phrases is a symptom of ambivalence, acceptance or apathy. There appeared to be little correlation between the use of the

phrase and the interviewees' interest in their children, for example, Thomas and Jake used the phrase and yet Thomas had gone to court to have his name added to his daughter's birth certificate, while Jake had spent a lot of time with his son before coming to prison and still maintained contact – although admittedly he'd stopped the child from visiting. Seth was apparently desperate to see his son, but was being hindered by his ex-partner's father, yet he had not made any significant moves to have this resolved as he did not trust anyone enough to involve them, also admitting he did not know how to do this. Lester and Asif didn't have great relationships with the mothers of their children and seemed to shrug the situation off as if they felt there was absolutely nothing they could do about it. For them, this may seem true, however the other interviewees' experiences showed that there were things they could do to maintain links with their children. I would argue here that those who sought out help and advice, and had the knowledge and resources to do so, were less likely to accept their fate and wait until something of significance happened to them.

7.4 VISITING TIME

"I only see my dad two weeks ago, it's the first time in six months, it's hard, I should be seeing them more often than that" Christopher, 21

According to the Prison Rules 1999, a convicted prisoner is entitled to "receive a visit twice in every period of four weeks", although the Woolf Report stated that "The ultimate aim should be at least one visit per week" (Woolf & Tumim, 1991). It has also been established that receiving regular visits reduces a prisoner's likelihood of reoffending (Great Britain Ministry of Justice and United Kingdom, 2013; Mills, 2014). However, for many of the interviewees visiting was proving a barrier to fatherhood, through logistics, perceived poor visiting facilities, or for some, a self-imposed ban on visiting. This tallies with research discussed in [2.9 Fathers in prison: the literature](#), (see Genisio, 1996; Nurse, 2002; Clarke et al., 2005; Dennison & Smallbone, 2015).

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From a logistics perspective two of the young men had been imprisoned several hundred miles away from their friends, family and children. Jamil, 17, had only received one visit from his mother who lived several hundred miles away, and infrequent visits from his pregnant girlfriend as it was “kinda far and expensive” for her to visit regularly. Christopher, 21, faced a similar issue and had been asking for a transfer nearer to home, as he said:

But I've been trynna get a transfer to go home because for her to travel that far down from [ANONYMISED] to here it's a long way, and I've been asking for a transfer for my kid's sake, because I do want to grow a bond with him and meet him and be a good dad.

He had been told that he had to wait three months until a transfer would be considered, which he did not think was right:

I been pushing and pushing for a transfer, they say I've got to be in this jail for three months, I've basically been here three months, and I just, I don't think it's fair that I should be, not be able to grow that bond with my child, and I'm stuck in a place which is so far away from home.

Christopher found this difficult to deal with and it was affecting his state of mind:

Yeah, but, I, I feel like I've gone from [ANONYMISED] to even further away from home, to, to, not see anyone, and it's hard to keep positive and, good, good minded, and keep yourself active and... without thinking about these things. It does, it does play on my mind a lot.

Kamil, 21, also found the logistics of four one-hour visits per month was proving difficult for his partner and their children. He had dealt with this by changing the times so that they had two, two hours visits per month instead. He felt this was better as he had a longer period with the baby, even if, in total, the amount of time was the same.

Some of the interviewees had self-imposed bans on visits from their children. For example, Jake, 20 did not want his son to visit as he didn't want him to be searched. He explained that he would rather wait until he was out to see his child.

It's nice for your son to see you.

Yeah. But then in this environment? Probably couldn't keep still for long enough anyway, so, it's no point, spiting myself for him to, spiting him to sort of feed myself like d'you know what I'm trying to say? So, it's a year, and a year is a long time, but when it is time will come, start to come innit.

Although he had had visits from his son Jonny, 18, also didn't like the idea of him being searched and was concerned about him being around the guard dogs.

I think that it's not a good place really to bring kids in here. They gotta be searched and be around dogs and that. And they must think, what the hell's going on.

Lester was not able to see his first son because of a poor relationship with the mother but said he would not be keen about his child visiting him in prison anyway:

'Cos I don't want him to come and see that his dad's in jail, even though he's gonna be small, he's still gonna like, see that vision in his head you know what I'm saying, oh, I'm visiting dis person in jail and stuff like that, but, at the end of the day, I don't want to miss out on his life really, you know what I'm saying.

For those interviewees who did see their children in visits, there was a feeling that the number of visits they received was not enough or that the visiting environment could be improved. For example, Simon, 20, said:

Four [visits a month] yeah. Which is not a lot is it really? When you think about seeing your kids for only four hours a month.

Simon had tried to get on to the enhanced prisoner scheme, where he could effectively earn more visits through good behaviour, but despite not getting any written warnings he still had not heard anything from the prison authorities:

And like, um they say, said that I can get enhanced like, and you can have six visits a month, well I've, I've done everything I can, to be enhanced like but they're just not putting me on it... like they said not um, don't like, behave and don't catch no written warnings for three months. So I've been in for five months and I haven't caught one and like they haven't put me on it and I keep asking and pushing through walls here and they just they're not like, you know what I mean?

Simon's experience with trying to get enhanced status had proved frustrating, as he explained when talking about filling in the application:

So I got an application yesterday, but I did get an application like two months ago, and I sent it and they um, they sent it back with a rejection saying I'd filled it in wrong. So like, um, I just. It might have been doing with my spelling or something. I'm not sure. But...

Here, as well as limiting Simon's visits with his children, the prison system was essentially limiting his ability to improve the situation by not allowing him enhanced prisoner status, or at the very least removing any control he may have had over the process. Equally there seemed to be a bureaucratic process in place which appeared to be confusing. In addition, Simon found visits difficult emotionally, as he explained:

It's hard leaving. I like it. I love it, but obviously my um, my one-year-old, well she'll be one soon, she like don't really know what's going on but my three-year-old knows that, she, like, she has to leave at the end so like when there's like five minutes before leaving she starts crying. You know, which is hard like, so.

Some of the interviewees felt the visiting rules and facilities were not adequate. Jonny, 18, explained the difficulties he faced when his son visited:

You can't, can't be hands on with him, [INAUDIBLE], I can only pick him up like a couple of [INAUDIBLE], can't constantly pick him up, can't go and play with him and um, read and that with him, you gotta stay seated.

Yeah.

It's hard but...

And I guess if he's two, when he did come in he probably wanted to run around didn't he?

Yeah, he loves to play in the play area and that but. It's just... it's hard to get up, it hurts me really to get up and watch him play and I can't go and play with him.

While Kamil, 21, also received visits from his stepdaughter and daughter but felt the visiting area was "not suitable for the baby". There was, however, also some positivity about visiting facilities. Although Thomas, 21, had not seen his daughter he thought the visiting area was good:

Yeah, and um, like things in place like, lounge visits, it's more of a comfortable area for your kids, they got a play area, they got a place with a fish tank and that, so it's a bit therapeutic.

Some of the interviewees admitted to closing themselves off from others while in prison. The most extreme example was Ryan, 21, who had not had a visit from anyone in the eight months he had been inside. As discussed in [5.6 Being a son](#), he said he had not 'earned' visits from his family and didn't deserve them. Ryan was clearly very emotional about the situation but, while he was able to articulate his emotions, he did not appear to allow himself to be supported in any way. While Ryan was not able to have any contact with his son, either direct or indirect, he had also refused to allow any of his friends and family to visit. He explained his reasoning with this rather contradictory statement:

I haven't asked for any visitors. Even though we are a close family we're pretty distant. So if, if you need each other we're there, we'll be the first ones there. But otherwise you're left to your own devices, right, and... You make your own mistakes, you learn from your own mistakes, you know, we've been brought up to be like independent but always have them family morals there, if someone needs something, you're the first one there.

While other interviewees had found ways to help themselves emotionally, perhaps by talking to other prisoners, or to their friends and families, Ryan had effectively closed himself off from any support networks.

While the visiting situation proved logistically and emotionally difficult, recent research has found that having strong familial relationships before entering prison did not automatically result in positive resettlement outcomes, but the strengthening of ties did. That is, if the visits strengthen already existing ties that will lead to positive outcomes (Brunton-Smith & McCarthy, 2017). Thus, it can be said that the quality of visits is important. This suggests that improving the quality of visits by enabling prisoners to see their children and wider families in a more amenable environment, where they can interact with their children and help to develop stronger bonds, should be a point of policy.

7.5 THE SOCIAL

"Obviously, Social Services are all for, all for the mothers and... basically dads [are] wiped off, like" Ryan, 21

I did not ask a specific question about interactions with local authorities or Social Services, or 'the Social' which was the preferred terminology among the interviewees, but the subject of local authority involvement was raised in nine out of the 15 interviews. The nine interviewees who discussed Social Services had had interactions with them in their own childhoods, as young fathers, through their relationships with their partners, or a combination of all three. This aligns with prior

research that suggests care leavers comprise around a quarter of the prison population (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002; Williams, Papadopoulou & Booth, 2012) and that many teenage and young fathers have experience of living in care (Swann et al., 2003; Clayton, 2016). Blades et al., (2011) suggests “up to a half” of children held in young offender institutions have been in care, compared to 1% of the general population who have been in care (Department for Education, 2011) and 2% of the general population who have been in prison (Herring, 2019).

It can be argued that for this cohort Social Services are implicated with varying degrees to limiting fatherhood. Firstly, because those who had been in care may not have experienced a functioning child/parent relationship, potentially inhibiting their ability to learn about parenting. Secondly, their involvement with Social Services as fathers had, as I will examine, limited or even denied them contact with their children. This means they had to, in a sense, father from afar, or at least redefine for themselves what it means to be a father, adapting to the limitations placed upon them. And thirdly, for those whose partners had been involved with Social Services, they had experienced how that involvement might hinder their partner’s experiences of parenting and thus of being a parent.

The following table shows which interviewees discussed any involvements with Social Services during their childhood, as a father or father to be, or whether their partners or ex-partners had been involved with Social Services. As I did not ask a specific question about care or Social Services (see [3.7 Interview questions](#) for more information) I cannot be sure that the remaining six interviewees had not had any interactions with Social Services, merely that they did not mention it in their interviews. I also do not know officially how many of the interviewees had been subject to care proceedings or were formally children in care.

TABLE 6: PARTICIPANTS’ INVOLVEMENT WITH SOCIAL SERVICES

Interviewee	During childhood	As a father	Partner

The needs and experience of young fathers in prison

Kamil	Yes	Yes	Unknown
Jake	Unknown	Unknown	Partner in foster care
Simon	Unknown	Unknown	Partner fosters sister
Jonny	Yes	Unknown	Unknown
Scott	Yes	Yes	Unknown
Ryan	Yes	Yes	Unknown
Christopher	Yes	Unknown	Unknown
Seth	Unknown	Yes	Unknown
Thomas	Unknown	Yes	Yes
Lester	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Dan	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Jamil	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Asif	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Jordan	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Mo	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown

Those interviewees that discussed this subject used the terms ‘the Social’, ‘Social Services’ or simply ‘care’, with only one interviewee, Thomas (21) using the professional term ‘local authority’. It seems reasonable to suggest here that the interviewees did not have an intricate knowledge of the inner

workings of the local authority social care system and saw 'the Social', or 'care', as one homogeneous entity. For the purposes of this section, I will use the terms 'Social Services' and 'care' to reflect the language used in the interviews.

The subject of Social Services arose quite naturally within the interviews. For example, Kamil, 21, when discussing his mother's issues with mental health and addiction, said, "I've had Social Services through all my life, through my mum like". This did not appear to be something he found strange or negative, simply a part of his upbringing. Kamil had also encountered Social Services after his arrest when he'd been bailed then later found to have cocaine in his system. He explained that due to the cocaine, "Social Services wanted to get involved then..." in relation to his daughter and stepdaughter. The topic of parental substance use was largely problematised in the 2000s as part of an increased focus on 'hidden harms' experienced by children (Flacks, 2019), with:

...the use rather than 'abuse' of drugs is thus framed as a behaviour that is problematic and, one might infer, enough to impact on a parent's right to care for a child (Ibid., p. 9).

Whether Social Services had wanted to become involved because Kamil had broken bail conditions, or they felt there was a risk of harm to his children because of his use of cocaine is unclear. But it should be noted that these two interactions with Social Services were from different faculties, that is Kamil's interactions with Social Services when he was a child was due to a risk of harm to himself, his interaction with them while on bail was potentially due to the risk of harm to his children. While Social Services were looking into the matter Kamil had been sentenced and sent to prison, so they had decided not to pursue it. Why they dropped the matter is also not clear, although Kamil said after he was sentenced and came to prison, they, "had no reason then to go forward with it 'cos I wasn't around". However, Kamil's contact with his daughter and stepdaughter had not been affected and he saw them regularly with his partner. The assumption can be made that if he had not received a custodial sentence then Social Services would have pursued the matter, which in turn suggests that Social Services may have believed Kamil being in prison meant his behaviour did not show a risk of

harm to his children. Kamil appeared to take this potential intervention of Social Services in his stride and merely accepted it as part of his journey through the criminal justice system. This is unsurprising if he had had “Social Services through all my life” as he claimed, yet he did not distinguish between the interactions, suggesting that to him Social Services was one entity.

Three of the interviewees had experienced involvement with Social Services through the mothers of their children. Jake, 20, said his partner had been in foster care as a child and, in fact, it was her foster parents who had helped them both when their son was born. Simon, 20, said his partner was providing a home for her sister, the exact legal basis of which is not known although he did use the term ‘fosters’. He also revealed that before coming to prison he had not lived with his partner because of the situation, as he explained:

Yeah, so, that’s the reason I don’t really live, live um over there as well [INAUDIBLE] she fosters her sister and obviously I’ve been in prison and stuff and I’m not... know what I mean?

Although Simon appeared to accept this it did mean that he had not been able to live with his two daughters before coming to prison. This could be seen as Social Services having indirectly placed a limit on his fathering. Thomas, 21, said his ex-partner had been adopted and now her adoptive parents were caring for their child, their granddaughter, and had applied for a Special Guardianship Order³. Thomas explained that the adoptive parents had “custody” [interviewee’s choice of term⁴] of the child because, as he stated, the mother, “lacks the capacity to meet the basic child needs due to cognitive ability”. Note the phrasing of Thomas’ answers here, with terms like Special Guardianship Order, which could be seen as quite a technical term, and his line about the child’s mother, which sounds like he’d taken it verbatim from a Social Services report. As discussed in [7.6 The Law](#) Thomas

³ A Special Guardianship Order is an order appointing a person or persons to be a child’s special guardian. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 provides the legal framework for special guardianship under the Children Act 1989. Section 115(1) of the 2002 Act inserted new sections 14A-F into the Children Act 1989.

⁴ In the Children Act 1989 the term custody was changed to residency, although it remains in common parlance.

was the only participant who had actively gone down the legal route to get his name put on his daughter's birth certificate, so it is perhaps unsurprising that he used such technical language. As a result of the situation with the grandparents and her "lack of capacity" Thomas' ex-partner was not allowed to live in the same house as her adoptive parents and her child, as Thomas explained:

She doesn't live with them no, she's got her own flat. She moved back in with her parents when she was pregnant. Then when the baby was born and the baby got put into the care of her mother and father she had to move out because she couldn't live under the same property.

Thomas had his own interactions with Social Services which I will examine in more detail later in this section.

Jonny 18, and Christopher, 21, mentioned having spent time in care during their childhoods, but they did not volunteer any further information and I did not pursue the matter. Later in his interview Christopher discussed how he had attempted to improve his relationship with his child's mother as he had seen families going through "court and Social Services" and did not want that to happen to his child. Christopher did not elaborate on what type of court he had had experience with, however he clearly felt that if he did not improve the relationship with the child's mother then getting contact would involve Social Services, as he explains:

'Cos, it's not nice, you see families that always split up and then always going through court and Social Services. I've seen it, I've been through it, I don't need to, I don't want my, my son to ever go through anything like that so, I wanna build the best life for him I can.

This raises a key point. Contact per se is usually agreed within the child arrangement orders framework under Section 8 of the Children Act 1989 as a private law matter (Cafcass.gov.uk, n.d.) rather than one involving Social Services, unless there are concerns about a child's welfare. Yet Christopher had equated Social Services with contact. Christopher's response to the idea of Social Services' involvement was to prevent them becoming involved in the first place by making the effort

to improve the relationship he had with his ex-partner. It could be interpreted that Social Services were seen as potentially negative who only appeared when a contact situation was going through court. Although he did not mention in detail any interactions with Social Services, Seth, 19, initially thought I was from Social Services and had brought his child in to see him. When I explained that I was not he seemed to relax but later expressed a fear of them, faltering in his answers at one point before asking, "Oh miss this won't go to Social Services and shit though will it?" This fear of Social Services' involvement in relation to criminal justice has been highlighted in prior research, for example, the Every Family Matters: Offenders' Children and Families in Bolton report showed that 75% of families where one of the parents was in prison did not disclose this information for fear of Social Services' involvement (Partners of Prisoner and Families Support Group, 2010). It is also pertinent to note here that one of the main aims of Social Services is to keep children with their families, rather than taking them away. The Children Act 1989 states that:

It shall be the general duty of every local authority (in addition to the other duties imposed on them by this Part)—

(a) to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need; and

(b) so far as is consistent with that duty, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families (Children Act 1989, Part III, Section 22).

However, among the participants of the study there appeared to be a general perception of negativity towards Social Services. This aligns with research that has found parents feel powerless and confused when dealing with Social Services (Brophy, 2006) and that "the partnership between social workers and parents is generally weighted in favour of the professionals" (Kaganas, 2009).

Three of the interviewees, Scott, 18, Thomas, 21, and Ryan, 21, talked more about their interactions with Social Services than the others, and I will examine their experiences here.

Scott, 18, had spent time in a secure care home at the beginning of his sentence and had since been working with Social Services in order to maintain contact with his son. This was via indirect contact, whereby Scott could send letters and cards to his son through Social Services, and he could also receive communications about his son this way. In my interpretation of his answers Scott seemed satisfied with this level of communication with his son and said, when asked if he thought it was good, "It is, yeah it is, it's really good". He also talked about his plans to see his son after his release, as the following exchange shows:

OK, erm, so have you thought about being a dad when you're released? Do you have any plans?

Yeah. Obviously I wanna, like, see him a lot when I get out [laughs]. I've got a lot of making up to do haven't I, so?

Do you know what the situation is? Will you be allowed to see him or will it be through Social Services?

I will be allowed to see him but it would be supervised for a short time. So they can check how stable I am, upon release.

Scott did not elaborate on the situation nor discuss how he felt about having supervised visits and being assessed by Social Services. This could be interpreted in a number of ways; that he was satisfied with this relationship and happy to follow instructions; that he understood he would have to follow any instructions if he wanted to see his son, regardless of whether he was happy with them or not, and lastly that he had perhaps internalised the Social Services narrative and had recognised the power relationship he had with them.

Thomas, 21, had also worked with Social Services so that he could gain contact with his daughter on his release. Thomas had a complex situation with his child, who was being looked after by his ex-partner's adoptive parents. As mentioned above Thomas explained that his ex-partner's adoptive

parents had applied for a Special Guardianship Order, which would give them parental responsibility for the child, as is common among grandparents. In their review of special guardianship, Wade et al., (2014) found that, “the profile of special guardians was strongly on the side of family carers, with grandparents the largest group” (Ibid., p. 20). Special Guardianship Orders allow the birth parents to also have parental responsibility, but a Special Guardian can undertake day-to-day care of the child without seeking the birth parent’s permission. Thomas had not been happy with this, as he explained:

If they’d got a Special Guardianship Order then the parents would have made the decision whether I get to see her when I get out or not. And I’ve assaulted their daughter so I think you... they would swear to not let me see her due to that fact, so, I didn’t like, I didn’t like the situation.

Thomas had engaged legal representation and had asked for the original local authority Care Order to be upheld. This kept his daughter under the care of his local authority, but meant he had a better chance of getting contact with her after his release, particularly because of the statutory duties placed on local authorities to assist parental contact with children in care.

And um, so the Special Guardianship Order got refused and they give, they granted the Care Order original that I asked for. So then when I get out now, I gotta do a six week assessment with the local authority before I get to see my daughter, and if I pass the assessment they give me then I, I, I have contact in that six weeks as well, to see how I am, and as long as, as long as I am I get to see her supervised...and I got, I got granted um parentage, 50% parental rights, and I got put on the birth certificate, and they said it will be amended, but it won’t look like it’s ever been amended. So it’ll look like I’ve been on it from the start.

Thomas explained that as the Special Guardianship Order had been refused he now ‘shared’ parental responsibility for his daughter, “So now it’s split between the four of us. So local authority have got 25%, I’ve got 25%, she’s [ex-partner] got 25%, and her parents got 25%”. There is no legal basis in this

assumption at all, as percentages of parental responsibility is never used and a local authority can exercise parental responsibility above that of others within a Care Order to safeguard the welfare of the child. The fact Thomas saw his situation in this way highlights a general lack of understanding of the law among the participants. Thomas seemed happy with this arrangement, knowing that not all decisions about his daughter could be made without his involvement:

Uh yeah, they cannot, cannot give a decision in [ANONYMISED] life without me, without me saying or knowing, so they have to ask me permission to take her on school trips and stuff like that.

He also appeared to accept the fact that he could potentially see his daughter after his release providing he followed Social Services' instructions:

But [Social Services] says I've got to show commitment to staying out of prison before I see her, because if she gets attached to me and I come back to prison, then it's not fair on her. So, make sure, like I say, I gotta remain drug free, because I take drugs on the out[side], on the out[side]as well.

Note here the use of the term 'attached' here, which could be seen as therapeutic language and suggests a cohesion with the nurturant father construct. Thomas had yet to meet his daughter. Social Services did not bring the child in to visit him as he had to undergo an assessment on release. He had asked whether visits with her were possible but had been refused because the assessment needed to be done first. It was unclear why this assessment could not get started while Thomas was in prison. His ex-partner also had a restraining order against him so did not visit, plus she was not allowed contact with her daughter herself as the child was resident with her adoptive parents. He was however allowed indirect contact with her as he explained about sending his daughter photographs of himself:

I gotta send them to Social Services, Social Services then gotta send them to the parents, and then if the parents, it's up to the parents then to decide when, when to show her the photos or not, it's their discretion. So, I could send her a photo this Christmas and they don't have to show her until next Christmas.

While this was not ideal, Thomas did not appear to find these limitations too restrictive. In fact, when talking about his ex-partner's reluctance to follow Social Services' rules he revealed what he had told her, which goes some way to explaining why he had followed the course of action he had:

It's like I'm speaking to her she's like 'Social Services tell me what to do and I can't handle it' and all that and I'm like [laughs] but if you want them to let you do what you want then you're going to have to, just do what they want you to do. It's not hard. She's like 'yeah but they're controlling me'. I'm like out there you can see my daughter, I ain't even met her yet, but fucking hell, if I had a chance to I wouldn't be...

For Thomas, doing what Social Services wanted meant he would get what he wanted, i.e., contact with his daughter. My interpretation of his answers and his demeanour during the interview was that, in principle, this would not be particularly difficult for Thomas, although of course what happened in practice can only be assumed. However, it should be noted that Thomas' interactions with Social Services had been largely positive and when he had done as they asked any legal actions he took had been agreed, as he explained:

But um, all the applications that I put forward in court got accepted didn't they? I put three forward and they all got accepted. I asked for a Care Order, parentage, and the responsibility and the birth certificate and they granted them all. So, the judge obviously didn't think I was that bad.

It can be argued that Thomas had not seen the involvement of Social Services as an insurmountable barrier. He had worked with them, followed their instructions, and appeared to feel that he was on

his way to gaining contact. In contrast, father of one Ryan, 21, felt that Social Services were the main barrier to him seeing his son, and expressed anger and resentment towards them, refusing to follow any of the advice he was given. Most of Ryan's interview concerned his interactions with Social Services and he launched into an explanation of his situation from the first question asked:

Can you tell me a bit about [your son]?

Right. For starters, I was at the birth, everything was going fine, it wasn't 'til Social Services got involved where [sic] I assaulted her father.

OK.

And erm, that's when everything hit the fan. And um. Basically Social Services put in, in the way that if I can assault her father, who's to say I wouldn't assault him, if he was playing up now you know?

Ryan went on to explain that he had still had contact with his ex-partner and son before the assault on her father. However, after the assault when they continued to see each other he said that Social Services had become involved and said his ex-partner was:

Putting [me] before the child. Which, er, with them implications then they're saying if this carries on, they're erm, they'll have, they're duty bound then to, to, go to court to see about putting the child into a, into care like, and I'm thinking well...

Without knowing details of the circumstances it can be assumed that Social Services were concerned with the welfare of the child and were talking about getting a Care Order. Although this did not appear to have happened as the child was still living with its mother, contact between Ryan, his ex-partner and his child had been withdrawn. Ryan was told he would need to go to court if he wanted further contact with either of them. He explained the rules about his ex-partner as he saw them:

If I try contacting the mother, she's gotta phone the police and have me up for harassment, which isn't, it never was, you know I sent her a couple of messages asking how she was, how the baby was and obviously she had to report that to Social Services and they've said, 'oh go to the police', having me done for harassment which...

Regarding his son, Ryan explained that Social Services had told him he needed to go to court to try to get supervised contact with his child. He found this course of action difficult to follow, saying, "I hate the sound of no", and continued:

And I'm afraid things like, ah you gotta do two years good behaviour and everything and that, that, that stresses me out. It upsets me that in a way. That's the way I go. So I purposefully commit an offence to come in prison so the answer is there is no answer.

It could be interpreted that Ryan committed offences because of the way he felt he had been treated by Social Services. This chimes with research that shows violent men are often seen as victims of circumstances, "violence is generally blamed on factors outside the men who perpetrate it" and "In an ironic twist male violence is used by these [fathers' rights] groups to demonstrate how victimised men are by the Family Law system" (Kaye & Tolmie, 1998, pp. 59-60). This is in contrast to Thomas, 21, who understood he needed to show a "commitment" to staying out of prison and not taking drugs in order to undergo an assessment to get supervised contact with his daughter. I found parts of Ryan's interview contradictory. On the one hand he explained that Social Services had told him he needed to go to court for supervised contact and needed to show two years of good behaviour. On the other hand, he claimed that no one had helped him, and he had not been told what he could do to gain contact, as the following exchange shows:

No, no one helps. I, I've not had any help whatsoever. I've tried contacting Services, Social Services, to find out in what sense, what do they ask, what do they ask for you know? As a father, what they expect from me. Oh, we can't say that, oh you gotta go through court, go

through court for contact. And that's it. Basically, being a father they've shut me out. Focus on the mother. Help the mother. Child's there. Forget the father. That's basically it, they've cut me out of their life all together.

When I probed this further Ryan continued to discuss how he felt that, as a father, he had unfairly been shut out of his son's life without any guidance about how he could rectify the situation. This echoes much of the dominant fathers' rights discourse around contact (see Bertoia & Drakich, 1993; Collier, 2005; Collier & Sheldon, 2006; Flood 2012):

To be honest I feel as though there is no help for fathers. You know. Especially going through these, you know, circumstances. It's like, who, who do you ask like, what, because obviously Social Services are the ones who were involved in the first place so I'm trying to find out what, what do they expect from me, from a father's... From a father's perspective what do they want from me? Oh, go through court. How, how, how can I know, how can I help myself, you know, like. You know, it's just like hitting a blank [sic] wall.

Again, this reflects current fathers' rights discourse that suggests fathers have become "the new victims of legal systems that have moved too far in favour of mothers" (Collier & Sheldon, 2006, p. 1). Although Ryan did not go into the details of the Social Services limitations, he later explained that there was a restraining order in place with his ex-partner, and that his parents and family did not have contact with the child either because of the "strict pattern". Despite being told he needed to go to court for contact, as Thomas had done, Ryan did not think this was a valuable avenue to pursue:

But there's... there's just no end like. It's, you know, I, I, I just want something set in stone. Do these things and even though, even though it's a lot of hurdles, jump over these hurdles and we'll help you get contact with your son. That's what I want to hear. Not, go through court. If I do that and they say no I'm doing all, all this stuff for nothing.

His answers suggest he did not want to go the court route as he was afraid that he would follow all the rules then still not be allowed to see his son. Despite saying he wanted to hear what hurdles he had to jump through he later seemed to find the idea of hurdles unsatisfactory:

Social Services... play a major part in, in children under the age of 16, they play a major part and that, and as a father, and they've upset it, what do they want? To jump over hurdles, what do they want? for me, so that you meet that goal.

Whereas Thomas and Scott had no option but to cooperate with Social Services as fathers, Ryan believed that Social Services did not help fathers at all:

No, they help, they help, they help the mothers... 'Cos the fact, they are raising your child. Fathers, well... Basically sperm donors. I, I, that's basically all it is... Obviously, Social Services are all for, all for the mothers and... basically dads [are] wiped off like, and the argument is that, ah the mother's obviously carried the child for nine months, before, prior to the birth, is that, it's crucial they stick together and everything else and they do the best they can for them, but the fathers they just wipe off the, the face of the earth, it's like...

Without knowing the details of the conditions Ryan faced with Social Services, I can surmise that Ryan had been prevented from seeing his child as there was felt to be a risk of harm to that child, possibly through either violence aimed at the child or violence aimed at the mother. Ryan felt that by not being allowed to see his child it could “mess” with his son’s future, “and the father come into his life later on where, he gets confused and it could affect his schoolwork and his, actual future in general, you know?” This suggests that Ryan did not see himself as a potential source of harm to his son and that the intervention of Social Services was both limiting his ability to father and affecting his son’s future. Ryan’s answers tally with dominant fathers’ rights debates, particularly a seeming denial of violence (Kaye & Tolmie, 1998, p. 53; Baskerville, 2004).

For Ryan, Social Services and the limitations they had imposed were the main barrier to him seeing his child. He felt that they were not on the side of the father at all, and that they would not help him.

From an outside perspective it seemed as if Social Services had given him instructions (go to court and show good behaviour for two years) but he did not find this satisfactory and saw Social Services as the gatekeeper to contact with his son. Without knowing the details of Ryan's sentence or the exact restrictions placed on him by Social Services, it is challenging to know whether his assessment of the rules is accurate. Equally some research into child protection assessments of men "*tend to lack depth and context*" (Brandon, Philip & Clifton, 2017) and it may be that Ryan's experiences of Social Services were extreme and he was not a danger to his child. I do not know the circumstances of Thomas and Ryan's restraining orders, but it does open the argument about whether contact where there is a potentially violent relationship between parents is appropriate (Kaganas, 2018). The Children Act 1989 put the child's welfare at the heart of family law:

[a] court...is...to presume, unless the contrary is shown, that involvement of [a] parent in the life of the child concerned will further the child's welfare (Children Act 1989, s 1(2A), inserted by Children and Families Act 2014, s 1, in force 22 April 2014).

This shows the legal presumption that having both parents in their lives is to the benefit of the welfare of the child. While this upholds the idea of putting the child's welfare first, it does not take into account the assumed harms to a child if its parents are in a violent or abusive relationship. Research, particularly by feminist commentators, has shown that, "despite the prevalence of domestic violence in private law proceedings, refusals of applications for contact are so rare" (Barnett, 2014; see also Kaganas, 2018; Hunter et al., 2020). Barnett's assumption is that as the vast majority of requests for contact are made by fathers, and men are more likely to commit domestic violence, then a large proportion of contact arrangements take place within a context of domestic violence (Ibid.). Barnett argues that the focus on both parents being active in a child's life has led to an increased scrutiny of mothers, who are often seen as "difficult" in contact disputes. The lens is on

them rather than the behaviour of the father, which in turn has led to the “ideological separation of contact and domestic violence” (Ibid.). Barnett argues that, “What is also absent from legal/political constructions of children’s welfare are the negative aspects of contact” (Barnett, 2014). This is in contrast to the fathers’ rights movements which, as aforementioned, often deny violence or portray violent men as the victims of an unjust legal system as they see it (Bertoia & Drakich, 1993; Kaye & Tolmie, 1998; Flood, 2012). This issue has been hotly debated with no clear resolution. What is clear though, in my opinion, is that each situation should be viewed individually, and contact should only be granted where it is in the child’s best interests. While this is the current formal legal approach, the problem is the lack of clarity about what ‘best interest’ means. If we look at Ryan and Thomas’ situations here, Thomas was willing to work on his behaviour and undergo supervised visits and other limitations to see his daughter. Ryan was not and saw any instructions from Social Services as an abuse of his rights as a father. These two conflicting stories highlight a very real challenge in child contact disputes in general where there is a potential for violence, not just for fathers in prison. I cannot offer a solution here. A 2020 report from the Ministry of Justice, entitled *Assessing Risk of Harm to Children and Parents in Private Law Children Cases*, made recommendations for improving the assessment of risk of harm, including better coordination across courts and other agencies dealing with domestic abuse, reviewing the pro-contact culture of the family courts system, and enhancing the voice of the child in contact cases, among others (Hunter, Burton & Trinder, 2020, pp. 171-189).

All nine interviewees who discussed Social Services had very different experiences. For the three who had more involvement with them as fathers (Scott, Thomas, and Ryan) there were very different responses to that involvement. Scott worked quite passively with Social Services. Thomas had been far more active in pursuing his legal requirements and getting a Special Guardianship Order discounted but had also worked with Social Services to start laying down the foundations for contact with his daughter when he was released from prison. In my interpretation Scott and Thomas were managing the limitations Social Services had placed on them. Ryan, in contrast, refused to work with Social Services and therefore the limitations placed on him had become an unsurmountable barrier.

This highlights that while young fathers in prison may face similar limitations to fatherhood from Social Services, they each react differently to those limitations. It is a recommendation that when working with young fathers in prison there should be a focus on helping them to develop the skills to be able to navigate these limitations. This would include advice on how to work with State systems such as Social Services. This would allow the State to not only uphold their duties to the safety of children, but also allow these young fathers to be fathers.

7.6 THE LAW

"In my head like I just don't get on with the police and their authority, you know?" Jonny, 18

For the participants there are two elements to the law when it comes to limiting fatherhood: criminal law, and family law. The first concerns the young men's journey through the criminal justice system, from contact with the police to sentencing. The second concerns the legal rights and responsibilities of fatherhood, including contact with their children. In this section I examine both of these in turn and look at how they limited fatherhood and any solutions the young men may have found to remove these limitations or to cope with them.

I asked each interviewee two questions around their status as fathers during their journey through the criminal justice system. The first was whether anyone had asked them if they were a father, and the second was whether they felt their fathering status had been reflected in their sentencing. Some of the interviewees couldn't remember if they had been asked if they were a father. This was hardly surprising for those who were now expectant fathers and had not known they were going to be fathers at some point, but those who were already dads seemed hazy on the subject also. Again, this is not surprising as being arrested and introduced into the criminal justice system must be a particularly stressful time and I was not expecting them to remember everything they had been

asked. For example, father of one Jake, 20, initially was not entirely sure whether he'd been asked if he was a father, then said he was 100% sure. He also said it didn't make a difference either way:

Did anyone actually ask you?

I think so, yeah, I think so, yeah, yeah, yeah. 100% yeah.

Yeah.

Don't make a difference though does it, really?

Well no, that's one of the things I'm interested in like, if you're...

Don't make a difference.

Clearly Jake did not think being a father made any difference to his arrest or sentence. Dan, 21, could not remember anyone asking him if he was a father, although he did not find out his partner was pregnant until he came into prison. Expectant dad Mo, 18, was unclear about whether he had been asked and seemed to confuse being asked if he was a father with being asked if he had children:

Um, can you remember if anybody asked you about whether you were a dad or about to be a dad, or anything, d'you remember? If your lawyer, or police, or judge?

What, asked me if I'm about to be a dad?

Yeah.

Um. Nah. Can't remember, you know.

So nobody asked you about, whether you were a parent.

Well, no, like they asked me if I've got kids, yeah.

Oh right, OK.

Yeah. Yeah.

Can you remember who that was? Whereabouts in the process?

I'm not sure like. Every person I spoke to they asked the question.

For Mo, the fact he was an expectant dad made no difference to his sentencing however:

Do you think that um, maybe you got a shorter sentence 'cos they knew you were gonna be a dad? Or..?

Um. Nah. Nah, it was just normal and I know people that got caught and um, yeah, yeah, yeah, less time than me.

Clearly in Mo's case, although it was known that he was expectant dad, it had made no difference to his sentence. Jonny, 18, said the police and his solicitor knew he was a father but that the information had not gone any further as he was not willing to discuss his child, as this revealing interaction shows:

Um, the police did and my solicitor did.

The police did and your solicitor?

Yeah, but no one spoke to my solicitor I suppose, and I don't like 'em, I don't like the police and that really. Being young and all that and my house got raided quite a bit.

Yeah.

And my house got raided about ten times in a month.

God.

It's just stressful, I dunno. In my head like I just don't get on with the police and their authority, you know?

So when they, so you didn't talk to them about your baby?

No.

And do you think that when you were sentenced do you think anybody realised that you were a dad, or..?

The judge in my, you know, he did and that, but.... it's just stressful... trying to deal with it myself.

Yeah.

I don't, I bottle things up...

You don't think it made a difference in your sentence that you were a dad or not?

No.

Thomas, 21, felt that if the judge had known he was a father he would have received a lesser sentence and that it was wrong he had not yet met his child:

I think if the judge [had] known it was my child, knows I would have missed the first Christmas and I haven't met her for a year and four months until I get out, I think the fact she's going to be 18 months old when I get out is, wrong... especially as I haven't met her at all. I think she'll be walking by the time I get out. I think I was walking at one. I think she's gonna do that.

Lester, 20, felt that his father status did not affect his sentence, which he felt was unfair:

Do you remember anybody asking you if you were a dad?

Well the solicitor did and, he knew that I had a, he knew that I had kids and that but it didn't help in my case anyway.

It didn't?

No. I thought it was a bit unfair you know what I'm saying so, I wanted to try and appeal my case and stuff like that so.

Yeah. So do you think the judge knew?

Yeah, the judge knew 'cos he, yeah he did, she did... She did know but, she didn't really bother about that, didn't bother that I got a son, little son and one's on the way and stuff like that.

OK. So you don't think it made a difference to your sentence?

No, no. It didn't, it didn't. If it was another judge I think it would have made a difference because, I'm a young man, first time getting in that sort of trouble you know what I mean, I've, and er, the situation I was in as well, it lead me to doing that, you know what I mean, so, it would have made it a, a difference if that was, if it was another judge to be fair. But 'cos it was that judge she didn't wanna hear none of it. No.

No. It was not your day.

No it was not my day.

Note that Lester believed it was down to the specific judge he had in his case. Ryan, 21, remembered being asked about his father status, but felt being asked whether anyone was dependent on him was degrading:

Uh, yeah. Um, they ask are you a father... yes. Do they count that it, no, it's I, I, I, don't like the fact that, I just think, it's like erm, degrading to me, like you know? It's not the fact I don't want help, but it feels like the fact, oh, any dependent on me? No, it feels like, it feels like I'm doing something wrong. Because it's not that I don't want to be a dad. I really do. Even, even if I can't physically be there for him I still want a part in his life. But...

While Jamil, 17, didn't tell anyone his partner was pregnant when he was being sentenced:

OK. So, um, when you were in, when you were sentenced, did they know you were gonna have a baby?

No [yawns] I didn't tell no one.

You didn't know then? Only when...

I didn't tell no one.

You didn't tell anyone?

No.

Can you remember if anyone asked you?

No.

No. So police didn't ask, or your lawyer or anyone like that?

No.

Jordan, 21, was clear that no one had asked him about his fathering status during his arrest and trial.

He was also sure that it may have reduced his sentence if the courts had known he was a dad.

No one. No one asked me at all.

And so the judge in your case when you were sentenced, no mention of you having a baby?

No.

Do you think that would have made a difference to your sentence?

I thought it would probably, probably have given me less time probably, if they'd looked at it.

Seth, 19, had quite a contradictory account of his experiences, firstly saying he didn't tell the police anything, then saying they knew about his child, then saying it shouldn't make a difference to his

sentence as the crime had been his fault, but then saying it should make a difference as a father should be spending time with his children.

Did anyone ask you if you were a dad, like the police, or..?

I don't tell the police nothing.

You don't. Can you remember if they asked you even?

Yeah, they obviously knows innit because when you get arrested they ask you any kids and shit.

Oh that's what they ask is it?

Yeah.

And did um, your solicitor or your lawyer. Do you think they knew that you were a dad?

In court they do obviously, because they said I had a baby on the way.

Do you think it made a difference to your sentence?

No.

So you didn't get a shorter sentence because you were a dad.

It don't make no difference do it really, out there, nothing to do with them. My fault anyway.

Do you think that, um, it should make a difference if you're a dad?

Yeah, of course, should be out there spending time with your kids innit.

Only three of the interviewees felt that their father status reduced their sentences. Scott, 18, felt that his sentence was reduced because he was a father, as the following exchange shows:

So when you were in court do you think the judge knew you were a dad?

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Yes, yeah, 'cos um on discussion with my barrister he put that forward for me because obviously it was, wasn't just me that it would be affected, my sentence and stuff, so he did put that forward.

And do you think that it helped, or?

I do, I do think it helped, yeah.

So do you think your sentence was different?

Yeah, I got less.

Also, Christopher, 21, had had a positive outcome with his fathering status when it came to sentencing:

Uh yeah, I did tell them and they did mention it in court. They just explained that I'd just had a child and er, I wanted to do right, do my time in jail and get out and be a good father figure. Get a good job and live a nice life instead of, er, living a life of crime.

OK. And do you think that made a difference?

Yes.

To your sentence?

A lot. 'Cos I've got something to look forward to, and like all my family's come together.

Do you think you got a less sentence because you were a dad?

Yeah.

Simon, 20, had perhaps the most pro-active approach to using his father status and desire to maintain a strong relationship with his children during his trial:

Can you remember if they ever asked you if you were a dad?

Yeah, um, my solicitor, but like um, uh, 'cos, I was always so I was like there um with my girlfriend and she said I'm always with the kids and stuff like that like, but my solicitor told her, told her to write, write a letter to the judge to say that I'm a good dad and stuff like that.

Oh OK, that's, so that's interesting, so your girlfriend wrote a letter?

Yeah, saying I know it's bad what I've done and I, he's, he's obviously going to go to prison but just don't take him away from the kids for too long.

And do you think that made a difference?

Oh yeah I reckon it did. I thought I was gonna get longer than what I got. So yeah. Well I been told I was getting longer and like I only had two years so...

What the participants' understanding of their experiences show is that there might not be a consistent approach to fathering status when it comes to sentencing. A review of the UK Sentencing Guidelines is out of scope of this study however, it is useful to note that a sentencing guideline released in 2019 entitled *General Guideline: Overarching Principles*, suggested that whether an offender was the "sole or primary carer for dependent relatives" should be considered as a factor in reflecting personal mitigation (Sentencing Council, 2019). As mothers are more likely to be the primary carers of children this of course applies to them rather than fathers (Minson, 2018). The courts also have a duty to consider the impact on the child of a parent's sentencing (Ibid.). The sentencing of parents has largely been examined from the mother's perspective and there are irregularities here too. For example, Epstein (2012) found that the parenting status of women was not always considered during sentencing, even though, "Imprisonment of a parent involves the forcible separation of parent and child – it interferes with the Article 8 rights of the child by depriving the child of parental care" (Epstein, 2012, p. 3). Parenting status as a mitigating factor in sentencing has also been discussed elsewhere, for example:

Regarding proportional sentencing, it is important for sentencers to know the unique pains of imprisonment of incarcerated parents and their significant unintended effects during pre-trial detention (Reef & Dirkzwager, 2019 p. 1665).

It seems appropriate to suggest that the parenting status of an offender, whether a mother or a father, should be considered when sentencing. While mothers are normally the primary carers of children and therefore, when they are imprisoned it could be more disruptive to a child's day-to-day life (Caddle & Crisp, 1997; Minson, 2018), this does not mean that fathers should be left out of the equation altogether. Whether offenders are fathers or not should, in my opinion, be considered in sentencing. However, as already discussed, the parenting status of prisoners (mothers or fathers) is not captured anywhere, so in the first instance it seems pertinent that there should be a concerted effort to collect this information in a more official manner at the point of arrest or charge (Caddle & Crisp, 1997; Magaletta & Herbst, 2001, p. 89; Sherlock, 2004; Raikes, 2009; Smith, 2015). This highlights the very real tension between criminal and family law and shows how these elements often conflict.

As well as their interactions with the police and courts during their arrests and trials there was another element of the law these men had to contend with – their legal role as parents, and the issue of parental responsibility in particular. I did not ask a specific question about what the interviewees knew about parental responsibility or whether their names were on the birth certificates of their children, which would grant them parental responsibility unless it had been rescinded. If a man has parental responsibility for a child, it is not automatically removed or changed because he is in prison and can only be removed through a voluntary agreement, or the courts. However, as none of these young men were married they would not automatically have parental responsibility for their child. Parental responsibility does not guarantee contact but it does make it easier for the father to have a say in the child's life (see [6.2 Love and marriage](#) for more information).

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Many of the young men felt there was nothing they could do while in prison to change any of the legal issues around seeing their children, suggesting a lack of awareness of their legal rights, which aligns with prior research (see Speake, Cameron & Gilroy, 1997). Equally they seemed to feel that they would be able to get contact once they were out of prison. For example, Jordan, 21, was clear that he was going to go the legal route when he left prison but didn't seem that knowledgeable on the process.

When I get my money back rolling in, gonna go to court try getting access. I know it's gonna be hard for me now 'cos I got a criminal record for violence but... I know I can, be here for her.

Asif was also assured that he would see his baby when he was out of prison but did not appear to know what the process may be, just that seeing his child would be 'obvious', "Obviously when I'm out I'm gonna, I'm gonna have full access to my kid".

While they may not have known the exact details of their legal rights, some of the interviewees talked in general terms about father's rights. For example, Jordan, 21, said he believed mums had more rights than dads:

Yeah, because obviously they're the ones that's gotto carry 'em for the whole nine months and go through it all, all the pain. But I still reckon it's wrong. Not being horrible to women... Still I think it's horrible they, they get the right over men like. When it should be 50/50, no matter, unless obviously the dad's a junkie or a waste of space, don't bother, but if he there wanting to do something about it he should be there like.

Ryan, 21, was particularly keen on the father's rights narrative, claiming that men were just seen as "sperm donors", while Thomas talked about the different rights for women in prison, who he believed were allowed to see their children. However, these discussions on rights were not particularly backed up by any legal evidence or knowledge, as Thomas' comments about mothers shows:

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They've got 50% parental rights as soon as they're pregnant. Whereas we've got to go to court for it, so...

And:

A woman can be pregnant in prison and keep the child for a, for a certain amount of weeks, until it's a certain age I think. I think they can keep a child in a cell up until they're about three, whereas a father's automatically took away from his child. No matter what, so I think they got more rights, yeah. I think they're treated differently in the justice system as well. Women to men.

Thomas' answers were not entirely accurate and highlight a misunderstanding of the law as, according to Gov.uk, Prison Life (n.d.a):

- Women who give birth in prison can keep their baby for the first 18 months in a mother and baby unit.
- A prisoner with a child under 18 months old can apply to bring their child to prison with them.
- Social Services arrange for children over 18 months to be cared for (for example by the prisoner's parents, or fostering).

Ryan, 21, who was quite vociferous in his views on Social Services, also found the legal process frustrating, and expensive.

Yeah, it was going to be a thousand pounds plus VAT for them to fill in the form, or £215 for me to do it myself, process it all myself. So, I've always done everything myself, um, as well as with the solicitors... turn up at the hearing, £375 plus VAT each time.

Both Ryan and Thomas' comments reflect some of the fathers' rights discourse that presents men as victims of a legal system they believe is skewed towards mothers (Collier & Sheldon, 2006).

However, Thomas, 21, felt the prison system had helped him when he went to court, including helping him get to court and providing him with a suit to wear. However, he did not appear to know whether he had accrued any legal costs:

I think it's going to when I get out, I haven't got any, I haven't got any uh, costs from legal, from legal aid or nothing at the moment, I think I got covered by legal aid so I dunno. I think it might have cost me to get a barrister or a solicitor, so that's, obviously in Crown, so [ANONYMISED], it's like a family court innit, it's classed as a... you have to have a barrister you can't have a normal solicitor, so I think I'll have to pay for the barrister but I won't have to pay for the solicitor? So I think it costs about £283, I think they said the court costs were, but I think I'll have to pay them when I get out, but if I didn't then I wouldn't have had no chance when I get out.

I would suggest that understanding the intricacies of both criminal law and family law is difficult at the best of time and even for scholars of both. Attempting to navigate the legal maze of both when you're a young father in prison is, I would argue, nigh on impossible. From the participants' comments it is clear there was a staggering ignorance of the laws that would be applicable to them as fathers. There was also, I would suggest, misunderstanding and skewed ideologies, leaving some to believe they were victims and others to believe that getting contact with their children after prison was 'obvious' and would be easy.

7.7 CONCLUSION TO THIS CHAPTER

It is reasonable to suggest that young fathers in prison face barriers that hinder their ability to father from prison, if we look at fathering as requiring a physical presence. These barriers range from the physical restrictions of the prison environment to the external restrictions imposed on prisoners through conditions set by Social Services and other legal entities, to the internal emotional and psychological barriers raised by the young men themselves. An initial analysis of these barriers paints

a depressing picture as, with them in place it is surprising that these young men are able to be fathers in any capacity. And yet, as this chapter has shown, some of the men found ways to circumnavigate these barriers, while some remained hopeful that once their prison sentences were finished, they would be able to resume being a father. What this chapter shows is that these young men are in a unique position as fathers. Not only do they face the acknowledged strains of being young fathers, but they have the added complication of trying to navigate the world of fatherhood from within the constraints of the prison system. Held in what Sykes called the “ultimate weapon” of the State for dealing with criminals (Sykes, 1954), this chapter shows that these young men were at the mercy of the State on many other levels as well. Their prior experiences show they have been let down by State systems and lacked trust in them because they don’t conform to the normative narrative.

Although it is not the focus of this research many of the interviewees had a fractured relationship with another State system – education. For example, Jordan, 21, and Christopher, 21, talked about being “naughty” at school – their choice of terminology, while Seth, 19, said he left school at 14 as he had gone to jail. Thomas, 21, and Jamil, 17, talked about having gone to a Pupil Referral Unit (Department for Education, 2013), while Kamil, 21, said he had gone to a ‘special school’ (his choice of terminology). Lester, 20, Ryan, 21, Scott 18, and Mo, 18, all said they had been ‘kicked out’ of school, as did Jonny, 18, at the age of 12 and Asif, 17, at the age of 14. Simon, 20, and Jake, 20, didn’t really talk about school and Dan, 21, had gone as far as taking the first year of A-levels, but the other interviewees had little in the way of academic history. In conjunction with Social Services and the criminal justice system it can be argued that no instrument of the State had served these young men in a positive way.

As a response to these external State limitations, the majority of young men in this study had resorted to a kind of apathetic mentality, allowing the experience to wash over them. For some, this meant that while they may have had the desire to do more to maintain relationships with their children, they felt unable to take action to do so. Also apparent was a distinct wariness in asking for help. As this

chapter has established that these young men had been let down by State systems, it is unsurprising that they refused, or were wary of, seeking help from these very systems. Those who did receive help had to acquiesce to the demands of the State in order to progress and the power balance was very much in favour of the State professionals (Kaganas, 2009).

There are recommendations that seem almost obvious here. For example, access to psychological services, improved visiting facilities, clear pathways to legal advice, parenting status considered in sentencing, and specific support programmes aimed at young fathers in prison are all relevant. However, in my opinion there is also a need to develop a sense of trust between these young men and State systems. Without building this trust there is little likelihood that they will turn to the very systems that are imposing limits to seek the freedoms that will enable them to be successful fathers.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

"[To be a dad] It is, it is a job it's erm, it's a full-time job, forever, forever 'til you die job really. So yeah." Lester, 21

When I began this research project it was clear from the extant literature that there was a significant gap in understanding the needs and experiences of young fathers in prison. There has been an increase in research into this cohort (see Buston, 2010; Buston et al, 2010; Ladlow & Neale, 2016), but I would argue there is still a lack of insight, and interest, in these young men and their fathering journeys. In [1.1 Background to the research](#) I wrote that, at the very highest level, the aim of this research study was to fill that gap. One study is not going to cover every aspect of a chronically neglected cohort and this was a qualitative study of just 15 young men in prison. However, I believe that the findings from this study add to the growing body of work concerning young fathers in prison.

It is my hope that it will prompt discussion and further research into this cohort, with a view to encouraging pro-active policies and practices that attempt to meet the needs of young fathers in prison and support them to have more positive fathering experiences. For example; officially recording prisoners' parenting status; introducing attending a birth as an example of ROTL; improved visiting facilities within prison; locating prisoners as close as possible to their families and support networks, and support in understanding legal matters and relationships with Social Services. These, and other recommendations for policy, future practices with young fathers in prison, and potential avenues of research are discussed in more detail in [8.3 Discussion and recommendations](#).

8.2 RESEARCH OVERVIEW

As discussed in [Chapter 1: Introduction](#), I was compelled to research this topic after reading that a young man in the criminal justice system is more likely to be a father or about to become a father, in comparison to his peers (Ladlow & Neale, 2016). The parenting situation of prisoners is not routinely collected, yet, despite a lack of official statistics, estimates suggest there is a higher probability that a young man in the criminal justice system is a father. I was intrigued that so little was known about them from a research perspective and decided to embark on this study with the view to increasing the understanding of this cohort.

To understand the nature of fatherhood and how it related to young fathers in prison, I began by researching the literature around the dominant social constructs of fathers. This proved to be a complex, confusing, and yet fascinating journey through the chronological development of the understanding of fatherhood over the past 100 years. The literature suggests there are two dominant, often conflicting, constructs of fathers in the UK: the traditional breadwinner and provider, and the 'new' father or nurturer. It was clear from the review that fathers in prison are underrepresented in the wider debates about fatherhood, and, unsurprisingly in any subsequent policy. And young fathers in prison are almost invisible. This contrasts with mothers in prison, who have been subject to wider

debate and subsequent policy, such as the Female Offender Strategy (Ministry of Justice, 2020a).

While non-resident fathers were problematised in the 1980s and 1990s, young fathers in prison, who are, of course, non-resident fathers, were not discussed. Although this cohort have been described as “multi-problem individuals” (Unruh, Bullis & Yovanoff, 2004) they were not seen as a social problem that required social action. When viewed through Rose & Miller’s *Problematics of Government* framework (Rose & Miller, 1992), this lack of problematisation could explain why they have been largely ignored by policy. While mothers in prison have not necessarily been problematised either, they have been viewed sympathetically and seen as vulnerable victims who merit help and support.

I then embarked on my field research which involved a qualitative study using semi-structured narrative interviews with 15 young men in prison who were fathers, or about to become fathers. In [Chapter 3: Methodology](#) I laid out the thought processes and methods behind this field research. The chapter also describes my choice of research setting and introduces the 15 participants. I transcribed each interview using an interpretative and denaturalised model of transcription, and coded textual data using thematic analysis. It is from the analysis that the participants’ ideas about fatherhood emerged and four main themes about their needs and experiences as fathers in prison arose. To provide structure to my conclusions on the research, I have chosen to use these four themes as focus points for discussion and recommendations.

8.3 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In [Chapter 4: Becoming a dad](#), I examined the participant’s initial steps in their fathering journeys, which proved to be illuminating. All the participants knew of the pregnancy, all of which appeared to have been unplanned. It was my interpretation of the data that while the pregnancies were unplanned, the children were not unwanted. Indeed, after an initial period of shock, the participants welcomed becoming a father. Some declared it was the “best thing” they had ever done (Jonny, 18), and described the birth as the “best day” of their lives (Jordan, 21). Far from being the feckless youths

they are often depicted as (Duncan, 2005; Clayton, 2016; Ladlow & Neale, 2016), the participants saw becoming a father as a positive event, and appeared to be engaged with the pregnancy, birth, and childcare. For the fathers to be, there appeared to be a degree of interest in the pregnancy, and those still in relationships with the mothers expressed care and concern for their pregnant partners. It is my belief that becoming a father could be an intervention point for young offenders in supporting them to engage with and develop relationships with their children. Research has shown that the first year tends to be when young unmarried non-resident fathers are most active in their child's life (Kalil, Ziol-Guest & Coley, 2005), and I would suggest future work with young fathers in prison focuses on this period with a view to providing emotional support and practical advice. This could include help with contact arrangements, practical childcare courses, and improved visiting facilities. I will be discussing the issue of visiting later in this section.

Becoming a father is also a time when these young men are likely to become involved with State services, such as the National Health Service and antenatal services. Many of the young men in this study attended the birth of their child or children before they came to prison. I would suggest that midwives and other healthcare professionals could be alert to the young fathers they encounter, providing education, advice, and support for those who become young parents. Programmes such as Sure Start could work on increasing the involvement of young fathers, which research suggests is currently "peripheral to the work of some Sure Start programmes" (Lloyd, O'Brien & Lewis, 2003). My belief is that this could help young fathers to develop strong bonds with their children which could benefit them if they then come to prison. There is also the potential to research whether programmes such as Sure Start could be extended into prisons, so that young fathers gain vital support during the first months of their children's lives.

The importance of attending the birth of their children was evident for the participants. Those who had attended the birth of their child or children had more engagement with them than those who did not. Equally, those who could not or did not attend the birth felt this absence keenly. I would suggest

that there is a need for further investigation into whether young men in prison could or should, subject of course to the mother's clear consent, be allowed to attend the birth of their child. While all safety and welfare aspects must be taken into consideration, allowing a prisoner to attend the birth of a child could be established in the rules of ROTL, potentially as part of the 'compassionate' grounds allowed to grant a Special Purpose Licence (Ministry of Justice, 2020a). The current Special Purpose Licence policy mentions visiting a dying relative, or emergencies relating to parental duties as examples of when it can be granted but does not mention fathers attending the births of their children (Ibid.). While granting of ROTL remains at the discretion of the prison governor or deputy governor, to have attending the birth as a specific example would be helpful.

To ascertain the participant's perceptions of fatherhood and whether they differed from the dominant social constructs as outlined in [Chapter 2: Literature review](#), I asked each participant what they thought being a good dad meant. This is discussed in the second analysis chapter, [Chapter 5: Being a good dad](#). It was my interpretation of the interview data that the participants had, to some extent, internalised both the breadwinner model of fatherhood, and the nurturer model, although their interpretations were nuanced. For example, providing for their children was seen as important but money was not the main factor, provision could also include moral guidance, support, and care.

Constructs that are integral to the fathers' rights movement were voiced by a minority of the participants. Ryan, 21, used language that reflects the more militant fathers' rights discourse, for example when discussing Social Services, he commented, "No, they help, they help, they help the mothers... 'Cos the fact, they are raising your child. Fathers, well... Basically sperm donors." It is pertinent to note that Ryan appeared to me to be the most angry and emotional of the participants and was the only one to show visible signs of being upset. This suggests some of his anger and emotion was aimed at the way he felt Social Services had treated him because he was a father and, he believed, had no rights. Thomas, 21, and Jordan, 21, also used terminology more usually seen in fathers' rights discourse, for example when discussing going to court to get added to his daughter's

birth certificate, Thomas commented about mothers, “They’ve got 50% parental rights as soon as they’re pregnant. Whereas we’ve got to go to court for it, so...” And Jordan, whose ex-partner did not allow him contact with their daughter said, “Still I think it’s horrible they [women], they get the right over men like.” These three participants all currently had no contact with their children, so it is understandable that they felt they had no rights, but it is pertinent to note how they vocalised this as the State being anti-father.

The participants also appeared to have internalised the concept of the new, nurturant father, using therapeutic language and talking about ‘bonding’ with their children, loving and caring for them. They also discussed being emotionally and physically available, characterised by the use of the phrase ‘being there’. ‘Being there’ is not an unusual aspiration among young fathers in general (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Speake, 2006; Osborn, 2007; Clayton, 2016) but it is striking that despite their desire to ‘be there’, this is what this cohort cannot do to a large extent. They cannot ‘be there’ physically for their children, nor in many ways can they be there emotionally. For these young men, whose children are still babies or very young, a physical presence is essential in terms of participating in basic child rearing activities. Yet they cannot do that and are effectively being hampered by prison as a tool of the State.

I suggest that there is a need for further investigation and consideration into whether and how the fatherhood status of young offenders should be built in to sentencing guidelines. Sentencing and parenting is a difficult topic but that does not mean we should shy away from it. The UK’s Female Offender Strategy recommends early intervention, an increase in community sentences and improvements to the female prison estate (Ministry of Justice, 2018), particularly for women with children. It is my belief that we could learn from this strategy and examine whether ideas like sentences served in the community rather than prison may benefit these young fathers who fit suitable criteria, and their children. I would also suggest there’s an opportunity for further research into parents, both mothers and fathers, and sentencing, with the aim of examining whether reducing

sentences or offering non-custodial sentences is beneficial for parent/child relationships. At present, these relationships tend to be viewed through the lens of children's rights, with a reliance by the courts on 'child welfare'. However, there are calls for risks to and welfare of both adults and children to be taken into consideration (see Hunter, Burton, Trinderm, 2020; Hunter et al., 2020), which could be further explored.

All the participants expressed the desire to be seen as good fathers. For some, this aspiration reflected their own experiences of being fathered, both positively and negatively. Relationships with their own fathers were mixed. Some wanted to follow in their father's footsteps and provide and 'be there' for their children. Others wanted to 'right the wrongs' of their fathers and do things differently. It appeared to me that these young men had clear views of what being a 'good' dad meant to them, and a strong desire to be that 'good' dad. It was my interpretation that these young men believed they could be 'good' fathers even though they were in prison.

For some, like Simon, 20, and Kamil, 21, this meant using visits and other methods of communication to build and maintain relationships with their children. For others this meant waiting until they were out of prison before 'resuming' their fathering role. Some, like Jake, 20, and Jonny, 18, did not want their children to visit them in prison. This was not, in my opinion, from a lack of emotional attachment, it was more that they believed this decision was good parenting, as they were shielding their children from what they perceived as the harsh prison environment. While it may seem impossible to be a father when you can't or don't want to see your children this was, nevertheless, one of the main findings of the study. I would suggest that not wanting their children to visit them in prison or waiting to resume fathering post release was also perfectly understandable.

There is potential here to capitalise on the desire to be 'good' fathers. I would suggest that a young man's father status should be central to any reform agenda. As well as education, accommodation and employment, there should be a focus on parenting in all rehabilitation and reform measures. This could be via education programmes, parenting skills courses or help with anger management, conflict

resolution and negotiation skills. Of course, there is the risk that these measures could become politicised, that is, seen as examples of government at a distance, when in fact the intention here is to offer support, rather than coercing people into acting in a defined way. History shows that attempts to force parental responsibility on people, such as the Child Support Act 1991, can backfire.

It is evident from the interview data that how these young men managed being a father in prison was dependent on the nature of their relationships – not just with the mother or mothers of their children, but with wider family networks and their relationships with the State. This is discussed in the third analysis chapter, [Chapter 6: The importance of relationships](#). The interview data showed that ‘family life’ is far more complicated than current policy would have us believe. Policy such as the Children Act 1989, focuses on the parent/child relationship, yet the data shows that the reality is far more complex. The childhoods of the participants, as well as that of their own children, involved extended families, particularly grandparents. The idea of the nuclear family as the norm has been sustained through policy, though this is not the reality. I would recommend that future policy further accommodates the role of the extended family, particular grandparents.

The men in the study who had good relationships with the child’s mother, even if they were no longer romantically involved, were more involved with their children. This suggests support for building relationships with the child’s mother should be made available. However, it’s not just about the mother/father relationship. The results of this study strongly argue that a family systems perspective must be employed. In other words, the whole family network should be involved as part of the reform agenda. These young men should not be considered in a vacuum. I would suggest that providing support and education on how to manage relationships is encouraged. There is also room for further research into this cohort’s relationships with their own fathers and how this affects their perceptions of fatherhood, as well as more research into the influence and involvement of maternal and paternal grandparents in the parenting of young men in prison.

The study found there are both external and internal limitations placed on these young men that hindered their fathering. This is discussed in the fourth analysis chapter, [Chapter 7: Limited fatherhood](#). One of these was the quality of prison visits. There have been long held debates about visits and how there is room for improvement, though little has changed (Morris, 1967; Nurse 2002; Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). This study contributes to these conversations. For the participants, visiting was hampered by logistics, the perceived unfriendliness of the visiting facilities, as well as self-imposed visit bans. There is a need to improve the visiting regimen and facilities across the prison estate. This would include ensuring prisoners are situated within a suitable distance from family, friends, and their support network. Those in the study who were situated several hundred miles from their families found this not only psychologically difficult but a huge barrier to contact with their children. Visiting facilities themselves are not necessarily set up for children. Jonny, 18, did not like his child being searched by dogs, and felt the environment was not right for visits. This should be changed so that men like Jonny, who had a strong relationship with his son before coming to prison, continue that relationship when inside. There should be more facilities for family visits and environments should be improved so they are less intimidating for children. Providing more conducive facilities with prison staff trained to deal with children could help persuade people like Jonny to let their children come in to visit and therefore maintain their relationship. This should of course be in line with the Prison Rules, 1999, Rule 35, and under the proviso that the health, safety, and security of all involved in a visit is of paramount importance.

Another limitation that was clear from the findings was that of the participants' understanding of their legal positions as fathers. The study found both a general misunderstanding and ignorance of family law among the participants as well as an apparent apathy to do anything about gaining contact while in prison. Several of the young men were waiting until they were released before investigating getting contact with their children, coupled with a tendency to not want to ask for help or support. Depending on their sentences this could result in large tracts of time being wasted and making any future involvement with their children even more difficult. In addition, some participants, such as Asif,

17, assumed he would get contact with his soon to be born child, even though he had no contact with the pregnant mother. Access to legal support should be available for those who want to gain contact with their children while they are in prison, or at least to start the process before they are released. I was intrigued by Scott's description of the fathers' group he attended when in a secure care home. This group discussed legal matters in an informal way, allowing the young fathers to discuss their experiences and learn from each other. When undergoing the research, I spoke to a member of staff about how little the men seemed to know about their legal positions. They explained that local solicitors regularly came to the prison to give advice and the young men could book time with them, but often did not. This was potentially seen as a lack of interest, however, if this method of helping with legal matters isn't working, I would suggest something more informal, such as a fathers' group, may provide a more positive outcome. Encouragement and help with pursuing legal matters would be beneficial.

In line with this I would also suggest help is offered with dealing with Social Services. Participants like Scott, 18, and Thomas, 21, who had developed good relationships with Social Services, were working towards contact with their children post release. Those who had a hostile relationship with Social Services, or feared them, such as Ryan, 21, and Seth, 19, experienced difficulties seeing their children. While Ryan and Seth's circumstances were more complex than a poor relationship with Social Services, it is my belief that assistance in dealing with them could be beneficial.

Where do these findings and discussions lead us in terms of policy? I would argue that, aside from the general policies encouraging family relationships, there are currently no specific policies in the UK related to young fathers in prison. From a policy perspective, general legislation around fathers and parenting largely errs on the side of the traditional breadwinner model. This leaves young fathers unable to fulfil the requirements set out in law. For example, young fathers in prison do not have to pay child support, young fathers in general are far less likely to be married to the mothers of their children than older fathers, and they are also less likely to be on the birth certificate..

In contrast there has been a focus on mothers in prison in recent years, such as the Female Offender Strategy, which recommends early intervention, an increase in community sentences and improvements to the female prison estate (Ministry of Justice, 2020a). There has been no such strategy for fathers in prison. The separation of a child from its mother is seen as problematic (Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2019), yet the separation of a child from its father is simply not considered. What does this say about fathers? That fathers are not necessary to a child's welfare? As discussed in [1.2 Research aims](#) this study is not and was never intended to be a call for fathers' rights and I am not suggesting equality between imprisoned parents. Mothers tend to be the primary carers of children and it is only correct that that should be considered when sentencing mothers, for example. There is also the sensitive issue of domestic abuse and, of course, the welfare of the child should always be paramount. However, I would argue that at present it appears as if fathers are largely ignored. While not expecting to be on an equal footing their fathering status should at least be considered and there is a need for policies that help and support young fathers in prison.

At the very least there should be an official collection of parenting status for all prisoners, whether mothers or fathers, which is not routinely collected at present. It is my hope that the findings from this research can assist in developing policies and practices that acknowledge the needs of young fathers in prison. For example, gathering the parenting status of prisoners; situating prisoners within reasonable travelling distances of their families and social networks; establishing intervention practices for young fathers during pregnancy; offering support with legal matters in a way that reaches those in need, for example fathers groups in prison, and psychological support for young fathers in prison and education not just around parenting skills, but also around relationship development and anger management.

We can see from Rose & Miller's *Problematics of Government* (1992) that through political rationalities, programmes of government, and the technologies of government that ensue, the State attempts to manage the private life of families through government at a distance. This leads to

attempts to corral all citizens into one way of behaving, which is seen as the 'ideal'. As mentioned above, educational programmes and other measures introduced to help parents should not prescribe a way of behaving, but work with individuals on their specific needs. Otherwise, it means that those who fall outside those ways of behaving are essentially ignored, and this in turn leads to their being failed by the system. The social constructs of fatherhood examined in [Chapter 2: Literature review](#) suggest there is a certain type of father, both a provider and a nurturer. It is almost impossible for these young men to live up to those constructs. Many aspects of fatherhood have been stripped away from them, such as physical contact, financial provision, developing relationships and emotional connections. For some this has led to apathy, to others, anger, and misunderstanding. This needs to change and that change could start with reviewing current policies.

As a final point of discussion, I would recommend that we look for positive examples of young fathers. We should endeavour to stop treating young fathers as a problem or a negative. We should try to stop thinking of them as problem individuals but as individuals with problems that require support. Defining their situations as negative becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Young fathers tend to be portrayed negatively, and this should not be the case. There is no reason why some of the young men I spoke to could not be the good dads they wanted to be. Of course, we can provide support, education, encouragement and the like but the outcomes cannot be forced. We must remember that there is still a need for these men to take personal responsibility for their lives and their children's lives. But they should be given support when they do. Services should treat these young men and their situations as individuals and as fathers, not just as one homogenous group. Supporting the young father is likely to have wide ranging benefits, not just for the young men themselves, but for their children, the mothers and wider society.

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The needs and experience of young fathers in prison

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: ETHICS FORM

LAW/E1	ETHICAL APPROVAL - RESEARCH WITH SUBSTANTIVE ETHICAL ISSUES		
<p><i>This form is to be used for a research proposal with substantive ethical issues. Please read the guidance on the Law School Research Ethics webpage if you are unsure whether to use this form, or Law/E2 which is a shorter form for research with few and minor ethical issues.</i></p>			
1 APPLICANT'S NAME AND EMAIL			
Jo Blackwell [ANONYMISED]			
2 STATUS			
Choose an item.			
3 IF A STUDENT: PROGRAMME OF STUDY AND NAME OF SUPERVISOR.			
PhD. Daniel Monk and Paul Turnbull			
4 DEPARTMENT			
Choose an item.			
5 TITLE OF PROPOSED PROJECT			
How young fathers in prison perceive and experience fatherhood; what needs they have as incarcerated fathers, whether these needs are reflected in current public policy, and the implications of gaps and shortcomings in policy.			
6 FUNDING SOURCE <i>Please advise if you have or intend to apply for external funding for this research, and the name of the funder concerned.</i>			
N/A			
7 ATTACHMENTS? <i>Please check the boxes if the following are submitted with this form</i>			
INFORMATION SHEET	CONSENT FORM	QUESTIONNAIRE	DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN
x	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8 DESCRIPTION AND RATIONALE OF PROPOSED PROJECT

There is seemingly plenty of research about fathers and fatherhood. Since fathers (absent, non-resident, indifferent) were problematized socially, culturally, politically, and economically in the 1980s, there has been a surge of research into fathering and fatherhood, particularly in the UK and the USA. However, the majority of this research has been about a very specific type of father, namely the urban white father, and how he can be more nurturing towards his children while divorced/separated or working full time, and not be a 'deadbeat dad'.

Existing research into fathers and fatherhood has originated from a range of disciplines and perspectives, including feminism of various ideologies; fathers' rights; children's studies; psychology and others. Some researchers have gone beyond examining the generic white, urban father, and examined more socially excluded groups of fathers. There is some research into teen and young fathers, for example, which suggests they are a marginalised and neglected group. There has also been research into fathers in prison, concentrating in particular on male identity and masculinity, the efficacy of fathering programmes, and the impact of an incarcerated male parent on his offspring.

Despite these pockets of study, there has been very little research into the fatherhood experiences of males who fit into two of these excluded categories: teen/young fathers in prison. The primary role of this project is to examine how young fathers in prison perceive and experience fatherhood, and what needs they have as incarcerated fathers. The secondary role is to assess whether these needs are being met by current public policy, and the implications of gaps and shortcomings in that policy. Estimates suggest around a quarter of young males in prison are fathers, or about to become fathers. Yet despite the acknowledged correlation between teenage fatherhood and juvenile offending, research into these two 'challenging' behaviours, and what happens when young fathers are incarcerated, has been largely neglected. This research aims to rectify that and to assess whether the current criminal justice system adequately attends to their needs as imprisoned fathers.

Research questions

- What perceptions of fatherhood do young, imprisoned men have? Do they have their own constructions of what fathering is? How does this differ from the current social constructions of fatherhood? What does it mean to be a father when you are in prison?
- How do young men 'father' from prison? Is it realistic to learn parenting/fathering skills while incarcerated? Are prisons set up to allow young men to father or are they disconnected even further from their children? What do young men need to parent from prison?

- What are the current policies around young fathers in the criminal justice system? Is a young man's parenting status taken into account during sentencing? Should young men who are fathers be given custodial sentences? Should young men in prison have the right to see their children, or should their children be kept away from the prison environment?

9 PARTICIPANTS *Please advise who your participants will be, the inclusion and exclusion criteria, how many participants there will be, how identified and how recruited.*

I intend to interview two 'groups' of participants in the study.

Group 1

I am aiming to conduct guided narrative interviews with up to 25 young fathers who are currently incarcerated in the criminal justice system. Ideally, these would be recruited at [ANONYMISED]. The facility includes a YOI and an adult male prison and I am hopeful I will be able to find enough participants at one site rather than having to split the research across multiple sites.

Participants must be aged 21 years or younger and must be a father or about to become a father.

This includes those men who may be acting as a 'step-father' to a partner's children, or who have been and will be undertaking a fathering role when not in prison. [ANONYMISED] runs a specific [ANONYMISED] and encourages prisoners to take part in numerous family and fatherhood courses. Ideally, some of the men in the study would be from this unit, or have undertaken such courses.

Although this project does not aim to examine the efficacy of such projects, having participants who have, and who haven't taken advantage of these services would be beneficial for the study.

Participants who do not see their children or stepchildren are not excluded from the study. In fact, it would be advantageous to interview both men who don't have strong father/children relationships, and those that do.

Participants will be fully informed of the nature of the research and asked to sign an informed consent form.

Prisoners who have committed crimes against children are excluded from the study.

I am currently in contact with the relevant people at [ANONYMISED] and would work with their agreed criteria for identifying and recruiting participants.

Group 2

I aim to conduct guided interviews with up to 10 people who work with young fathers and/or young offenders in order to gain a different perspective on young imprisoned fathers' perceptions and needs. These could include:

- Prison staff at [ANONYMISED]
- Charity workers, e.g., [ANONYMISED] who work with young men and fathers in prison
- Members of the Youth Justice Board and the local Youth Offending Team for [ANONYMISED] and the surrounding areas

Participants in group 2 would have to work specifically with young fathers and/or young offenders. There are no particular exclusions for this group.

10 METHODS *Please advise how the data will be collected and analysed*

Group 1

One-to-one guided narrative interviews would be held with those participants who have been identified for the study. These would take place at an agreed venue on site at [ANONYMISED]. Interviews would be recorded via a device approved by the establishment. Written notes will also be taken by the interviewer during the interview. Interviews would last approximately one hour. Post interview the recording would be transcribed by the interviewer and data from the written notes added. All personal information would be removed from the data. Once the PhD is finished all personal data would be destroyed.

Group 2

One-to-one guided interviews would be held with those participants who have been identified for the study. These would take place at a mutually agreeable venue, or via telephone if necessary.

Interviews would be recorded on audio, and written notes will also be taken by the interviewer during the interview. Interviews would last approximately one hour. Post interview the recording

<p>would be transcribed by the interviewer and data from the written notes added. All personal information would be removed from the data. Once the PhD is finished all personal data would be destroyed.</p>
<p>11 SCHEDULE <i>Please advise the date the project started or is due to start; the proposed start date of data collection; and the date by which research will be completed.</i></p>
<p>Field research is likely to start circa March/April 2018.</p>
<p>12 SUMMARY OF THE ETHICAL ISSUES <i>Please read the College Guidelines on Research with Ethical Implications to gain an understanding of the ethical issues which might apply for your research. Mention if your research includes feedback to participants, and how you will do this; and if there is an international element to the project, and what (if any) additional ethical issues this raises.</i></p>
<p>Justification: This project requires the inclusion of participants as mentioned above in order to ascertain their direct experiences and to assess their needs. Without speaking to young fathers in prison it would be impossible to gain a robust understanding of this group. Interviewing people who work with young fathers and/or young offenders will give the research an additional perspective and provide a more robust and rounded research outcome.</p> <p>Access to participants: I will work closely with the establishment involved to ensure that all participants fully understand why they have been asked to participate in this study, the nature of the study and its importance, and at all times will ensure they feel comfortable with the questioning and understand they can drop out at any time.</p> <p>Informed consent: All participants will be required to sign an informed consent form, and will be given an information sheet outlining the project objectives.</p> <p>Potential harm: There is unlikely to be any physical risk to the participants during this research. However, for group 1, some of the questions may probe into emotional areas around relationships with families and partners, which could leave participants feeling vulnerable or upset. I would work with the establishment concerned to ensure that there are resources available post interview should any of the participants require it.</p>
<p>13 DOES YOUR RESEARCH INVOLVE AN EXTERNAL BODY IN YOUR DATA COLLECTION OR TO GAIN ACCESS TO YOUR PARTICIPANTS? <i>If YES, please advise the name of the body (and its nature, whether it is a company or a charity etc.) and whether it has its own ethical approval process. If it does, please advise at what stage your project is in that process</i></p>
<p>YES. [ANONYMISED], currently at negotiation stage.</p>
<p>14 DO THE PARTICIPANTS INCLUDE VULNERABLE INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS? <i>If YES, please advise what extra safeguards you will introduce. If UNCERTAIN, please explain – e.g., participants are online, cannot fully assess their vulnerability.</i></p>

<p>YES. I will follow all agreed ethical practices with the establishment involved and work with them on ensuring participants are fully aware of any implications of the research and that they understand what is being asked of them.</p>				
<p>15 ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO PARTICIPANTS OR THIRD PARTIES? <i>If YES, please advise how this risk will be minimised. If UNCERTAIN, please explain.</i></p>				
<p>There is potentially some emotional risk to participants in group 1. I will work with the establishment to ensure there are adequate resources available post interview should any of the participants require it.</p>				
<p>16 ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO RESEARCHERS? <i>If YES, please advise how researchers will be supported. If UNCERTAIN, please explain.</i></p>				
<p>There is minimal risk to the researcher in conducting interviews within a secure prison facility. Every effort will be taken to follow the advice of the establishment staff to ensure the researcher is not put at any additional risk.</p>				
<p>17 IF YOU HAVE AN ADVISORY BOARD, DO YOU HAVE A PROCESS TO IDENTIFY AND MANAGE CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS? <i>If YES, please advise how.</i></p>				
<p>N/A</p>				
<p>TO BE COMPLETED BY SUPERVISOR</p>	<p>DATE RECEIVED</p>	<p>Click here to enter a date.</p>	<p>DATE PASSED TO SREO</p>	<p>Click here to enter a date.</p>
<p>18 SUPERVISOR COMMENT</p>				
<p> </p>				
<p>19 SREO DECISION AND CATEGORISATION OF PROJECT</p>				
<p>Choose an item. Choose an item.</p>				
<p><i>Any additional comment by SREO:</i> Click here to enter text.</p>				
<p>22 DATE APPLICANT ADVISED OF SREO DECISION</p>			<p>Click here to enter a date.</p>	
<p> </p>				

APPENDIX 2: HMPPS FORM

Welcome to the Integrated Research Application System

IRAS Project Filter

The integrated dataset required for your project will be created from the answers you give to the following questions. The system will generate only those questions and sections which (a) apply to your study type and (b) are required by the bodies reviewing your study. Please ensure you answer all the questions before proceeding with your applications.

Please complete the questions in order. If you change the response to a question, please select 'Save' and review all the questions as your change may have affected subsequent questions.

Please enter a short title for this project (maximum 70 characters): Young fathers in prison: April 2018

1. Is your project research?

Yes/No

2. Select one category from the list below:

- Clinical trial of an investigational medicinal product
- Clinical investigation or other study of a medical device
- Combined trial of an investigational medicinal product and an investigational medical device
- Other clinical trial to study a novel intervention or randomised clinical trial to compare interventions in clinical practice
- Basic science study involving procedures with human participants
- Study administering questionnaires/interviews for quantitative analysis, or using mixed quantitative/qualitative methodology
- **Study involving qualitative methods only**
- Study limited to working with human tissue samples (or other human biological samples) and data (specific project only)
- Study limited to working with data (specific project only)
- Research tissue bank
- Research database

If your work does not fit any of these categories, select the option below:

- Other study

2a. Please answer the following question(s):

- Does the study involve the use of any ionising radiation? Yes/**No**
- Will you be taking new human tissue samples (or other human biological samples)? Yes/**No**
- Will you be using existing human tissue samples (or other human biological samples)? Yes/**No**

3. In which countries of the UK will the research sites be located? (Tick all that apply)

- **England**
- Scotland
- **Wales**
- Northern Ireland

3a. In which country of the UK will the lead NHS R&D office be located:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • England • Scotland • Wales • Northern Ireland • This study does not involve the NHS
<p>4. Which applications do you require?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NHS/HSC Research and Development offices • Social Care Research Ethics Committee • Research Ethics Committee • Confidentiality Advisory Group (CAG) • Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) <p><i>For NHS/HSC R&D Offices in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales the CI must create NHS/HSC Site Specific Information forms, for each site, in addition to the study wide forms, and transfer them to the PIs or local collaborators.</i></p> <p><i>For participating NHS organisations in England different arrangements apply for the provision of site-specific information. Refer to IRAS Help for more information.</i></p>
<p>5. Will any research sites in this study be NHS organisations?</p> <p>Yes/No</p>
<p>6. Do you plan to include any participants who are children?</p> <p>Yes/No</p>
<p>7. Do you plan at any stage of the project to undertake intrusive research involving adults lacking capacity to consent for themselves?</p> <p>Yes/No</p> <p><i>Answer Yes if you plan to recruit living participants aged 16 or over who lack capacity, or to retain them in the study following loss of capacity. Intrusive research means any research with the living requiring consent in law. This includes use of identifiable tissue samples or personal information, except where application is being made to the Confidentiality Advisory Group to set aside the common law duty of confidentiality in England and Wales. Please consult the guidance notes for further information on the legal frameworks for research involving adults lacking capacity in the UK.</i></p>
<p>8. Do you plan to include any participants who are prisoners or young offenders in the custody of HM Prison Service or who are offenders supervised by the probation service in England or Wales?</p> <p>Yes/No</p>
<p>9. Is the study or any part of it being undertaken as an educational project?</p> <p>Yes/No</p> <p>Please describe briefly the involvement of the student(s):</p> <p>Field research study for my PhD.</p>
<p>9a. Is the project being undertaken in part fulfilment of a PhD or other doctorate?</p> <p>Yes/No</p>
<p>10. Will this research be financially supported by the United States Department of Health and Human Services or any of its divisions, agencies or programs?</p> <p>Yes/No</p>

11. Will identifiable patient data be accessed outside the care team without prior consent at any stage of the project (including identification of potential participants)?

Yes/No



HM Prison &
Probation Service

APPLICATION FORM TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH ACROSS HMPPS

1. Full title of the research:

How young fathers in prison perceive and experience fatherhood; what needs they have as imprisoned fathers, whether these needs are reflected in current public policy, and the implications of gaps and shortcomings in policy.

2-1. Date of request:

Date of request: 23/04/2018

2-2. Data Collection Dates:

Data Collection From: 18/06/2018

Data Collection To: 08/06/2018

3. The following categories are the HMPPS Research Strategic Priorities.

- Delivering the Punishment and Order of Courts
- Security/Safety/Public Protection
- **Reducing Reoffending**
- Improving Efficiency and Reducing Costs

4. Are you targeting specific groups?

Yes/No

If yes, please specify which groups you are targeting and specify approximate numbers for each group:

<p>Number</p> <p>Women</p> <p>Male: 25 total</p> <p>Young People (under 18) : 15</p> <p>Young Offenders (18-21): 10</p> <p>Sex Offenders</p> <p>Violent Offenders</p> <p>Self Harm</p> <p>Domestic Violence</p> <p>Extremism* / Radicalism</p> <p>Staff: 4</p> <p>Religious Groups</p> <p><i>Please identify which religious group(s)</i></p> <p>Other</p> <p><i>Please specify:</i></p>
<p>5. Are you a HMPPS psychologist in training undertaking this research for a Chartership exemplar?</p> <p>Yes/No</p>
<p>6. Chief Investigator:</p> <p>Title Forename/Initials Surname</p> <p>ORCID ID</p> <p>Post</p> <p>Qualifications</p> <p>Employer</p> <p>Work Address</p>

Post Code
Work E-mail
Personal E-mail
Work Telephone
Personal Telephone/Mobile
Fax
7. Other key investigators/collaborators. Please include all grant co-applicants, protocol co-authors and other key members of the Chief Investigator's team, including non-doctoral student researchers.
Title Forename/Initials Surname
Post
Qualifications
Employer
Work Address
Post Code
Telephone
Fax
Mobile
Work Email
8. Student (please refer to the Prison Service Instruction 22/2014 for information on students eligible to apply).
Educational projects
Name and contact details of student(s):
Title Forename/Initials Surname
Mrs Joanna [ANONYMISED] Blackwell
Name and contact details of academic supervisor(s):
Academic supervisor 1

Title Forename/Initials Surname Mr Paul Turnbull [ANONYMISED] Academic supervisor 2 Title Forename/Initials Surname Professor Daniel Monk [ANONYMISED]					
Please state which academic supervisor(s) has responsibility for which student(s): <i>Please click "Save now" before completing this table. This will ensure that all of the student and academic supervisor details are shown correctly.</i>					
Student(s)	Academic supervisor(s)				
Student 1 Mrs Joanna [ANONYMISED] Blackwell	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 20px; text-align: center;"><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> <td>Professor Daniel Monk</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="width: 20px; text-align: center;"><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> <td>Mr Paul Turnbull</td> </tr> </table>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Professor Daniel Monk	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mr Paul Turnbull
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Professor Daniel Monk				
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mr Paul Turnbull				
9. Is your application supported by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HMPPS HQ • Community Rehabilitation Company • Private Sector Prison Title Forename/Initials Surname Contact Name: [ANONYMISED] • Ministry of Justice • Other Government Department • Other 					
Please attach a CV for all researchers.					
10. Is your application funded by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HMPPS HQ • Community Rehabilitation Company • Private Sector Prison • Ministry of Justice • Other Government Department • Other 					

<p>11. HMPPS Project Lead (if applicable)</p> <p>Title</p> <p>Forename/Initials Surname</p> <p>Post</p> <p>Directorate</p> <p>Group</p> <p>Telephone</p> <p>Email</p>
<p>12. Please advise when the outcomes are required by (and whether there are any critical deadlines when information from this research is required):</p> <p>This research is part of my PhD in Law at Birkbeck University. The expected completion date of the entire PhD is within the academic year 2019/2020.</p> <p>This field research within [ANONYMISED] is currently planned for June/July 2018. I am in discussions with [ANONYMISED] on the exact dates.</p>
<p>13. How long do you expect the study to last in the UK?</p> <p>Planned start date: 18/06/2018 Planned end date: 06/07/2018</p> <p>Total duration:</p> <p>Years: 0 Months: 0 Days: 19</p>
<p>Research Aims & Objectives</p>
<p>14. Summary of the study. Please provide a brief summary of the research (maximum 300 words) using language easily understood by lay reviewers and members of the public. Where the research is reviewed by a REC within the UK Health Departments Research Ethics Service, this summary will be published on the website of the National Research Ethics Service following the ethical review.</p> <p>There is seemingly plenty of research about fathers and fatherhood. Since fathers (absent, non-resident, indifferent) were problematized socially, culturally, politically, and economically in the 1980s, there has been a surge of research into fathering and fatherhood, particularly in the UK and the USA. However, the majority of this research has been about a very specific type of father, namely the urban white father, and how he can be more nurturing towards his children while divorced/separated or working full time, and not be a 'deadbeat dad'.</p> <p>Existing research into fathers and fatherhood has originated from a range of disciplines and perspectives, including feminism of various ideologies; fathers' rights; children's studies; psychology and others. Some researchers have gone beyond examining the generic white, urban father, and examined more socially</p>

excluded groups of fathers. There is some research into teen and young fathers, for example, which suggests they are a marginalised and neglected group. There has also been research into fathers in prison, concentrating in particular on male identity and masculinity, the efficacy of fathering programmes, and the impact of an incarcerated male parent on his offspring.

Despite these pockets of study, there has been very little research into the fatherhood experiences of males who fit into two of these excluded categories: teen/young fathers in prison. The primary role of this project is to examine how young fathers in prison perceive and experience fatherhood, and what needs they have as incarcerated fathers. The secondary role is to assess whether these needs are being met by current public policy, and the implications of gaps and shortcomings in that policy.

Estimates suggest around a quarter of young males in prison are fathers, or about to become fathers. Yet despite the acknowledged correlation between teenage fatherhood and juvenile offending, research into these two 'challenging' behaviours, and what happens when young fathers are incarcerated, has been largely neglected. This research aims to rectify that and to assess whether the current criminal justice system adequately attends to their needs as imprisoned fathers.

15. What are the principal research questions/objectives? *Please put this in language comprehensible to a lay person.*

What perceptions of fatherhood do young imprisoned men have? Do they have their own constructions of what fathering is? How does this differ from the current social constructions of fatherhood? What does it mean to be a father when you are in prison?

How do young men 'father' from prison? Is it realistic to learn parenting/fathering skills while imprisoned? Are prisons set up to allow young men to father or are they disconnected even further from their children? What do young men need to parent from prison?

What are the current policies around young fathers in the criminal justice system? Is a young man's parenting status taken into account during sentencing? Should young men who are fathers be given custodial sentences? Should young men in prison have the right to see their children, or should their children be kept away from the prison environment?

16. What are the secondary research questions/objectives if applicable? *Please put this in language comprehensible to a lay person.*

N/A

17. What are the potential benefits of the research?

To HMPPS policy/business? How does the research link to HMPPS business priorities? How could the findings be operationalised?

The research will provide a deeper understanding of the needs of young men who are fathers and how they could be better served by the criminal justice system. This could potentially help to shape future policies around dealing with young fathers in prison, with a view to reducing reoffending and strengthening family ties.

To academic knowledge in the field of study?

While there is considerable research into fathers and fatherhood, and some research into young fathers, and some research into fathers in prison, there has been very little research into the fatherhood experiences of teen/young fathers in prison. This research aims to fill that gap and to really ascertain what it means to be a young father imprisoned in the criminal justice system.

18. What previous research has been conducted in this area?

There has been research about fathers in prison, but very little about the needs of young fathers in prison and whether these needs are being addressed by current policies.

19. What are the main limitations of the research project?

As this is a time limited PhD study this will not be a longitudinal project.

Research Plan & Methodology

20. Broadly speaking, what type of methodology do you intend to use in order to deliver this research:

- **Literature Review**
- Rapid Assessment/Systematic review
- Action Research
- Case Studies
- Process Evaluation
- Impact Evaluation
- Economic Evaluation
- Other

21. Please summarise your design and methodology. It should be clear exactly what will happen to the research participant, how many times and in what order. Please complete this section in language comprehensible to the lay person.

Do not simply reproduce or refer to the protocol. Further guidance is available in the guidance notes.

The research is split into two groups of participants.

Group 1

I am aiming to conduct face-to-face guided narrative interviews with up to 25 young men who are currently in prison and who are fathers or about to become fathers. Each participant will be asked to attend one interview, which will last

1-1.5 hours. There will be no follow up interviews. Interview questions will include some initial non-identifying information, such as number of children and general demographics, followed by a selection of questions intended to encourage the participant to talk about his perceptions of fatherhood, himself as a father, and how he manages his parenting relationships in prison. A draft version of the questions is attached as part of this submission. Please note, as this is a guided narrative interview and not a questionnaire not all questions will be asked. Which questions are asked will be dependent on the nature of the individual interview and which direction the narrative is taking.

Interviews will take place at [ANONYMISED]. The facility includes a YOI and an adult male prison and I intend to find enough participants at one site rather than having to split the research across multiple sites.

Interviews will be recorded. I will be using an Olympus WS-853 voice recorder to record the interviews. I am aware that recording devices are classed as list B items under the Prison Act (as amended by the Offender Management Act, 2007). The make and model of this voice recorder will be given to security before entering the establishment. This is the standard used at [ANONYMISED] as advised by [ANONYMISED].

Interviews will be conducted in English. [ANONYMISED]

The first three interviews will be treated as a pilot of the questions. After these three interviews I will reflect on the outcome of the interviews, and make amendments to the questions, if necessary.

Participants must be aged 21 years or younger and must be a father or about to become a father. This includes those men who may be acting as a 'step-father' to a partner's children, or who have been and will be undertaking a fathering role. [ANONYMISED] a specific [ANONYMISED] unit, and encourages prisoners to take part in family and fatherhood courses. Ideally, some of the men in the study would be from this unit, or have undertaken such courses. Although this project does not aim to examine the efficacy of such projects, having participants who have, and who haven't taken advantage of these services would be beneficial for the study.

Participants who do not see their children or stepchildren are not excluded from the study. In fact, it would be advantageous to interview both men who don't have strong father/children relationships, and those that do.

Prisoners who have committed crimes against children are excluded from the study.

Participants will be fully informed of the purpose of the research and their part in it through a written information sheet. They will also be asked to sign an informed consent form. Both the information sheet and the informed consent form will be available in standard and Easy Read formats. [ANONYMISED] At the end of each interview participants will be given a debrief form reminding them of their right to withdraw their information, and giving them contact details if they wish to know more about the research, or if they require assistance after the interview. The debrief form will be available in both standard and Easy Read format, and in Welsh, on request.

I am currently working with [ANONYMISED] on the best ways to identify and recruit suitable participants.

Group 2

I am aiming to conduct guided interviews with up to 10 people who work with young fathers and/or young offenders in order to gain a different perspective on young imprisoned fathers' perceptions and needs. Each participant will be asked to take part in one interview, which will last 1-1.5 hours. Participants will be fully informed of the purpose of the research and their part in it through a written information sheet. They will also be asked to sign an informed consent form. Participants will be informed that they can withdraw their data up to six months after the date of the interview. If they do this all data will be destroyed. Interviews can either be face-to-face or by telephone, depending on the wishes of the participant. Interviews will be recorded using an Olympus WS-853 voice recorder. At the end of the interview participants will be given a debrief form reminding them of their right to withdraw their data. In the event of a telephone interview I will use email to communicate the information sheet, consent form, and debrief form. There will be no follow up interviews.

Participants include:

- Prison staff at [ANONYMISED] approximately four participants)
- Charity workers, e.g. [ANONYMISED], who work with young men and fathers in prison (approximately three participants)
- Members of the Youth Justice Board and the local Youth Offending Team for [ANONYMISED] and the surrounding areas (approximately three participants)

Participants in group 2 would have to work specifically with young fathers and/or young offenders. There are no particular exclusions for this group.

The first two interviews will be treated as a pilot of the questions. After these two interviews I will reflect on the outcome of the interviews, and make amendments to the questions, if necessary.

22. What are the main methodological and/or operational risks and how will these be mitigated? Any conflicts of interest?

There is unlikely to be any physical risk to the participants during the research interviews. However, as outlined in A62, for the young men in prison some of the interview questions may probe into emotional areas around relationships with families and partners, which could leave participants feeling vulnerable or upset. I have discussed this with [ANONYMISED] and will work closely with him and the staff at [ANONYMISED] to minimise this risk.

I am aware that I have a duty to disclose certain information obtained during research to relevant staff. This includes behaviour that is against Prison Service rules and can be adjudicated against (rule 51, Prison Rules 1999); undisclosed illegal acts (previous and planned), and behaviour that is harmful to the research participant, such as intention to self-harm, commit suicide, or harm others. I will make all participants aware of this duty at the beginning of their interviews. This information will also be explained on the information sheet, the consent form, and the debrief form.

Post interview, participants will have access to services within [ANONYMISED] including [ANONYMISED], Safer Custody, the Listeners, the Samaritans, and the chaplaincy, should they wish to discuss any issues that have arisen. They can access these services via the CMS messaging system or, for the Listeners and the

Samaritans, via freephone. Information on these will be included in the debrief form, which will be given to all participants at the end of the interview.

There are no conflicts of interest that I am aware of.

23. Please select the following as appropriate, and give as much detail about data collection methods as possible.

(Where relevant, attach references for instruments or drafts of questionnaires etc.)

- Case records
- **Observation**

Face-to-face guided narrative interviews will be held with those participants identified for the study. Non-identifying data from these interviews will be collected and analysed. Interviews will be recorded via a device approved by the establishment. Written notes will also be taken by the interviewer during the interviews. Post interview the recording will be transcribed by myself and any data Interviews from the written notes added. The recordings will then be deleted. Any identifiable personal information will be removed from the data. I will be using the software tool MAXQDA to help collate and manage the data. All data will be held on a password protected electronic device which only I have access to. Once the PhD is completed all data relating to the interviews will be destroyed.

Questionnaires (please tick the type below and complete further details)

- Self completion
- Administration by researcher
- Postal
- Web based
- Other

Research Analysis & Dissemination

24. Please describe the methods of analysis (statistical or other appropriate methods, e.g. for qualitative research) by which the data will be evaluated to meet the study objectives.

Once all of the interviews are concluded the transcriptions of these interviews, plus any interview notes will be analysed. I will be using thematic analysis to identify and record any patterns that emerge across the interviews. The general approach I will be taking is based on the six phases outlined by psychologists Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke. The six phases are:

1. Familiarisation with data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes among codes
4. Reviewing themes

5. Defining and naming themes

6. Producing the final report

I am using this approach as I believe it is the best way to organise and interrogate the data in reference to my research questions.

Aside from the interview data, I will also be reviewing current policies about fathers in prison, and examining them against the themes raised from the interview data. I will also be examining the interview data against a literature review that examines the concepts of fatherhood from a number of different perspectives.

I will be using the software tool MAXQDA as a way to collate and manage all the data. Access to this software will be password protected and will be stored on a password protected device only available to the researcher.

25. Will the research include a reconviction study?

(If yes please state how this will be conducted)

Yes/No

NB. The body reviewing an application, which includes a reconviction element, should forward it to the Re-offending and Criminal Career Statistics team in OMS Analytical Services in the Ministry of Justice.

26. Does the proposed study involve the collection/use of personal data?

Yes/No

28-1. How do you intend to report and disseminate the results of the study? Tick as appropriate:

Peer reviewed scientific journals

- Internal report
- Conference presentation
- Publication on website
- Other publication
- Submission to regulatory authorities
- Access to raw data and right to publish freely by all investigators in study or by Independent Steering Committee on behalf of all investigators
- No plans to report or disseminate the results
- **Other (please specify)**
Summary research report outlining the main findings of the report and analysis.
Final PhD thesis.

28-2. When will the research summary and project review form be made available for HMPPS?

Research summary and project review form will be available at the completion of my PhD. Circa 2020.

Research Ethics

29. Summary of main issues. Please summarise the main ethical, legal, or management issues arising from your study and say how you have addressed them.

Not all studies raise significant issues. Some studies may have straightforward ethical or other issues that can be identified and managed routinely. Others may present significant issues requiring further consideration by a REC, HRA, or other review body (as appropriate to the issue). Studies that present a minimal risk to participants may raise complex organisational or legal issues. You should try to consider all the types of issues that the different reviewers may need to consider.

This research has been passed by the Birkbeck Law School Ethics Committee.

The main ethical considerations are:

- To ensure participants are fully cognisant of the purpose of the research and their part in it- To obtain their informed consent
- To ensure they are aware that their interview responses will be fully anonymised
- To ensure they are fully aware that the interview recordings will be destroyed after transcription and that all written transcriptions will be stored on a password protected electronic device that only the researcher has access to
- To ensure participants understand they are free to withdraw their information and responses within a set time limit (six months from the date of the interview) and that withdrawing their consent will not compromise them in any way
- Overall, to ensure the rights, safety, and wellbeing of the participants is not compromised.

It is also acknowledged that for the young men in prison some of the interview questions may probe into emotional areas around relationships with families and partners, which could leave participants feeling vulnerable or upset. I have discussed this with [ANONYMISED] and will work closely with him and the staff at [ANONYMISED] to minimise this risk.

I am aware that I have a duty to disclose certain information obtained during research to relevant staff. This includes behaviour that is against Prison Service rules and can be adjudicated against (rule 51, Prison Rules 1999); undisclosed illegal acts (previous and planned), and behaviour that is harmful to the research participant, such as intention to self-harm, commit suicide, or harm others. I will make all participants aware of this duty at the beginning of their interviews. This information will also be explained on the information sheet, the consent form, and the debrief form (see below).

In order to mitigate any potential risks the following strategies will be used:

Participants will receive an information sheet prior to the interviews. This will outline the purpose of the research and the participant's part in it. The information sheet will outline the format of the research (interview and timings), how the participant's responses will be anonymised, how they are free to withdraw their information, and contact details should they require any further information. It will also include information about my duty of care to them with regard to rule 51, Prison Rules 1999.

The information sheet will be available in both a standard and Easy Read format (both of which are attached with this submission). [ANONYMISED]

Once participants have read the information sheet and have shown they are willing to continue as a participant, they will be given an informed consent form, which they will be asked to read and sign. The informed consent form outlines eight key points that the participant must read and agree to. They will show their agreement by signing the consent form. I will start the interview by reading through the consent form with the participant to ensure they understand all the points and are happy to continue with the rest of the interview. The informed consent form will be available in both a standard and Easy Read format (both of which are attached with this submission). [ANONYMISED]

Both the information sheet and the informed consent form will explain to the participant that they have the right to withdraw their data after the interview within a period of six months from the date of the interview. If they decide to withdraw their data all data will be destroyed and will not be used in the research. Participants will be able to contact a named member of staff at [ANONYMISED] if they wish to withdraw [ANONYMISED]. This member of staff will then inform the researcher of any such decision.

In [ANONYMISED] absence, the participant can contact a member of the [ANONYMISED] team via the CMS messaging system. At the end of the interview participants will be given a debrief form (attached with this submission). This will thank them for their participation and reiterate information given in the information sheet and the informed consent form, including that they can withdraw their information up to six months after the date of the interview. The debrief form will also provide contact details for participants should they have any further queries or need support after the interviews. The debrief form will be available in both standard and Easy Read formats, [ANONYMISED], on request.

The debrief form will also contain information for those participants who may wish to receive a copy of the summary findings (results) of the research. This will be available at completion of the PhD, (anticipated completion date 2019/2020). In order to receive a copy it will be reliant on the participant to contact a named member of staff ([ANONYMISED]) at [ANONYMISED] who can then forward the request. [ANONYMISED] will be provided with a summary of the research so it will always be available to members of staff.

Regarding Easy Read, I have followed advice on making written information easier to understand and I have run all written communications through the readability tool <https://www.webpagefx.com/tools/read-able/>. I do not believe this research poses any significant legal risks.

Regarding issues with management of the research. I will require some assistance from [ANONYMISED] to help recruit relevant prisoners for interview, and I will also need access to them and interview space within the establishment. I intend to mitigate these risks by working closely with staff at [ANONYMISED] so the administration of interviews works as smoothly as possible. [ANONYMISED]

30. Has a relevant Ethics Committee approved the research?

Yes/No

Name of REC: School Research Ethics Committee

Professor Everson

Address Birkbeck, University of London, Malet Street

E-mail [ANONYMISED] REC Reference number Enclosed Copy of REC opinion To follow
31. I confirm that the research will comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 and any other applicable legislation, and will also comply with the expectations set out in AI17/2014. No amendments to the scope or nature of the research will be made without agreement of the approving body.
Access to prison establishments/NPS divisions/CRCs/Youth
32. Does your research cover: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prison• National Probation Service• Community Rehabilitation Companies
33. Does your research require access to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Young Offenders' Institutions• Youth Offending Teams/Secure Training Centres• Secure Children's Homes• High Security Prison Establishments
34. Please select each region/category and then select the prison establishments within those regions/categories where you wish to conduct the research: [ANONYMISED]
35. and 36. [ANONYMISED]
37. Please state the reasons for choosing the selected prison establishments/NPS Divisions/CRCs: [ANONYMISED] includes a YOI and an adult male prison and I intend to find enough participants at one site rather than having to split the research across multiple sites. I have attended a [ANONYMISED] presentation day at [ANONYMISED] with the charity [ANONYMISED] and was impressed with the way [ANONYMISED] is working with fathers. I would like to learn more about the [ANONYMISED] and how men's experiences differ if they have taken part in any family/fatherhood training and if they have not. <i>1500 chars max</i>
38. If you wish to conduct your research in more than four prisons, please provide further details on why this number of prisons is required: N/A
39. Have any prison establishments/NPS Divisions/CRCs already been approached about this research? If so, provide details: Yes/No I have received agreement from [ANONYMISED], that he is willing for the research to take place at [ANONYMISED] The research has also been discussed and agreed at the [ANONYMISED]. I am currently working with [ANONYMISED] to arrange the research interviews. <i>1500 chars max</i>

40. How long will the researcher need to be inside each prison establishment? (Please state the number of days and the number of hours per day)

I intend to undertake 25 interviews with prisoners. Subject to access etc. I would imagine this would take no more than 10 days, with an average of three interviews per day. With each interview taking 1-1.5 hours, I would be inside the prison for up to six hours per day depending on schedule.

41. Please list any equipment which you are intending to use within the prison establishments/NPS Divisions/CRCs:

I am intending to use a pen and paper to take notes during the interview.

I will also be using an Olympus WS-853 voice recorder to record the interviews. I am aware that recording devices are classed as list B items under the Prison Act (as amended by the Offender Management Act, 2007). The make and model of this voice recorder will be given to security before entering the establishment. This is the standard used at [ANONYMISED] as advised by [ANONYMISED]. 1500 chars max

42. How will you identify the offenders to be involved in the research?

I will work with staff at [ANONYMISED] to help identify suitable participants for the research.

Participants must be aged 21 years or younger and must be a father or about to become a father. This includes those men who may be acting as a 'step-father' to a partner's children, or who have been and will be undertaking a fathering role. [ANONYMISED] runs a specific [ANONYMISED], and encourages prisoners to take part in numerous family and fatherhood courses. Ideally, some of the men in the study would be from this unit, or have undertaken such courses. Although this project does not aim to examine the efficacy of such projects, having participants who have, and who haven't taken advantage of these services would be beneficial for the study.

Participants who do not see their children or stepchildren are not excluded from the study. In fact, it would be advantageous to interview both men who don't have strong father/children relationships, and those that do.

Prisoners who have committed crimes against children are excluded from the study.

43. Please state how long the researcher will need to be in contact with the offender/s:

Interviews will be scheduled to last 1- 1.5 hours.

44. Please state how many staff would be involved (sampling of staff is required):

No more than two members of staff would be required. One to escort me within the prison after security, and one to escort the prisoner to the agreed area for the interviews.

45. How long will the researcher need to be in contact with staff?

For the prisoner interviews I would need contact with staff during the administration of the interviews, including assistance with helping to recruit applicable men. I would then need contact for the actual interviews themselves, e.g. escorting me within the prison to the agreed area for the interviews.

As part of my research I also wish to interview up to four members of staff who work with young fathers to get their perspective on young fathers in prison. This would include a face-to-face or telephone interview of 1-1.5 hours and could be done at any time. I do not need to be at [ANONYMISED] to conduct these interviews.

46. Are there any resource implications for HMPPS?

E.g. anticipated demands on staff time, office requirements, information etc...

Anticipated demands are:

Staff to help identify participants and to help administer the interviews, i.e. escort myself and participants to and from the interviews.

Staff to be interviewed themselves. This would include up to four members of staff for a face-to-face or telephone interview of approximately 1-1.5 hours.

I will require a private room or space to conduct the interviews with prisoners.

APPENDIX 3: RESEARCH PROPOSAL FORM

[ANONYMISED]

Application to undertake Research

Researcher details*	
Surname: Blackwell	Title: Mrs
Forename(s): Joanna [ANONYMISED]	
Contact address: [ANONYMISED]	
Contact telephone: [ANONYMISED]	Email: [ANONYMISED]

Research Supervisor details	
Surname: Monk	Title: Professor
Forename(s): Daniel	

Contact address: [ANONYMISED]	
Contact telephone: [ANONYMISED]	Email: [ANONYMISED]

Research Supervisor details	
Surname: Turnbull	Title: Mr
Forename(s): Paul	
Contact address: [ANONYMISED]	
Contact telephone: [ANONYMISED]	Email: [ANONYMISED]

Name and address of sponsor (if applicable)

N/A

*If more than one researcher is involved please provide details of all

Proposed research aims and objectives

Research title:

How young fathers in prison perceive and experience fatherhood; what needs they have as incarcerated fathers, whether these needs are reflected in current public policy, and the implications of gaps and shortcomings in policy.

Reason for undertaking research (academic qualification, for commissioning body etc.):

Academic qualification: PhD

What are the research questions?

What perceptions of fatherhood do young imprisoned men have? Do they have their own constructions of what fathering is? How does this differ from the current social constructions of fatherhood? What does it mean to be a father when you are in prison?

How do young men 'father' from prison? Is it realistic to learn parenting/fathering skills while incarcerated? Are prisons set up to allow young men to father or are they disconnected even further from their children? What do young men need to parent from prison?

What are the current policies around young fathers in the criminal justice system? Is a young man's parenting status taken into account during sentencing? Should young men who are fathers be given custodial sentences? Should young men in prison have the right to see their children, or should their children be kept away from the prison environment?

What are the potential benefits of the research:

[ANONYMISED]

Additional research for the [ANONYMISED]. Although the research is not about the [ANONYMISED] per se, it could potentially highlight the benefits of the unit. Deeper understanding of the needs of young fathers within the establishment.

- To wider criminal justice process

A deeper understanding of the needs of young men who are fathers and how they could be better served by the criminal justice system. This could potentially help to shape future policies around dealing with young fathers in prison.

- To academic knowledge in the field of study

While there is considerable research into fathers and fatherhood, and some research into young fathers, and some research into fathers in prison, there has been very little research into the fatherhood experiences of teen/young fathers in prison. This research aims to fill that gap and to really ascertain what it means to be a young father incarcerated in the criminal justice system.

Research plan and methodology

I intend to interview two 'groups' of participants in the study.

Group 1

I am aiming to conduct guided narrative interviews with up to 25 young fathers who are currently incarcerated at [ANONYMISED].

Participants must be aged 21 years or younger and must be a father or about to become a father.

This includes those men who may be acting as a 'step-father' to a partner's children, or who have been and will be undertaking a fathering role when not in prison. [ANONYMISED] runs a specific [ANONYMISED], and encourages prisoners to take part in numerous family and fatherhood courses.

Ideally, some of the men in the study would be from this unit, or have undertaken such courses.

Although this project does not aim to examine the efficacy of such projects, having participants who have, and who haven't taken advantage of these services would be beneficial for the study.

Participants who do not see their children or stepchildren are not excluded from the study. In fact, it would be advantageous to interview both men who don't have strong father/children relationships, and those that do.

Prisoners who have committed crimes against children are excluded from the study.

Group 2

I aim to conduct guided interviews with up to 10 people who work with young fathers and/or young offenders in order to gain a different perspective on young imprisoned fathers' perceptions and needs. These could include:

- Prison staff at [ANONYMISED]
- Charity workers, e.g. [ANONYMISED], who work with young men and fathers in prison
- Members of the Youth Justice Board and the local Youth Offending Team for [ANONYMISED] and the surrounding areas

Participants in group 2 would have to work specifically with young fathers and/or young offenders.

There are no particular exclusions for this group.

What data will be collected:

Group 1

One-to-one guided narrative interviews would be held with those participants who have been identified for the study. Data from these interviews will be collected. Interview would be recorded via a device approved by the establishment. Written notes will also be taken by the interviewer during the interview. Interviews would last approximately one hour. Post interview the recording would be transcribed by the interviewer and data from the written notes added. All personal information would be removed from the data. Once the PhD is finished all personal data would be destroyed.

Group 2

One-to-one guided interviews would be held with those participants who have been identified for the study. Data from these interviews would be collected. Interviews would take place at a mutually agreeable venue, or via telephone if necessary. Interviews would be recorded on audio,

and written notes will also be taken by the interviewer during the interview. Interviews would last approximately one hour. Post interview the recording would be transcribed by the interviewer and data from the written notes added. All personal information would be removed from the data. Once the PhD is finished all personal data would be destroyed.

Which standardised or specific measurement tools will be used:

I'm not sure what you mean by this.

Please list any equipment you want to bring into the establishment:

Pen and paper. Recording device. Most appropriate device to be discussed with [ANONYMISED] staff.

What is the proposed timetable for the research:

Ideally research would take place at [ANONYMISED] in April or May 2018.

When will the research be completed:

Field research ideally finished by June 2018.

Research analysis and dissemination

How will the research be analysed?

Recorded interviews and interview notes will be analysed by the researcher to identify themes and any key areas of interest. Information will be reviewed against current policies within this area.

How long will research materials be retained?

Once the PhD is finished all personal data will be destroyed.

How will the results be disseminated?

Via PhD thesis. Possibility of published papers.

Access to [ANONYMISED], to prisoners and to staff

Please say why you have chosen this establishment:

[ANONYMISED] includes a YOI and an adult male prison and I am hopeful I will be able to find enough participants at one site rather than having to split the research across multiple sites.

I have attended a [ANONYMISED] day with [ANONYMISED] and was impressed with the way [ANONYMISED] was working with fathers. I would like to learn more about the [ANONYMISED] and how men's experiences differ if they have taken part in any family/fatherhood training and if they have not.

Have other establishments been approached? If so say which.

No

How long will the researcher(s) have to be inside the establishment?

1-2 weeks depending on access.

How many prisoners will be involved? Indicate special characteristics where applicable (Vulnerable Prisoners, Young Offender, etc.):

I would like to interview up to 25 participants. They must be aged 21 years or younger and must be a father or about to become a father. This includes those men who may be acting as a 'step-father' to a partner's children, or who have been and will be undertaking a fathering role when not in prison.

[ANONYMISED] runs a specific [ANONYMISED], and encourages prisoners to take part in numerous family and fatherhood courses. Ideally, some of the men in the study would be from this unit, or have undertaken such courses. Although this project does not aim to examine the efficacy of such projects, having participants who have, and who haven't taken advantage of these services would be beneficial for the study.

Participants who do not see their children or stepchildren are not excluded from the study. In fact, it would be advantageous to interview both men who don't have strong father/children relationships, and those that do.

Prisoners who have committed crimes against children are excluded from the study.

How will you identify the prisoners to be involved? (i.e., how will you recruit participants):

I would require some help from [ANONYMISED] to identify prisoners within the [ANONYMISED], who may be willing to participate, as well as any prisoners within the YOI who are fathers or about to become fathers.

How much contact will the researchers need with prisoners?

1-1.5 hour interview time with up to 25 participants.

How many staff would be involved?

To be discussed.

How much contact will the researchers need with staff?

Contact during the administration of the interviews.

I would also like to interview some members of staff as part of the Group 2 participants. This would include a one hour interview.

What are the resource implications (i.e., demands on staff time, office requirements, information access, etc.):

Staff to help identify participants and to help administer the interviews, i.e. escort participants to and from the interviews.

Staff to be interviewed as part of Group 2.

Interview space.

Research ethics

Please state how informed consent will be obtained:

Participants will be fully informed of the nature of the research and asked to sign an informed consent form. I have attached a consent form for review.

Has a relevant ethics committee approved the research? If so please name the committee and its affiliation and attach a copy of the submission to the Ethics Committee with their response.

Yes. The Birkbeck Ethics Committee has approved the research. Submission form and agreement email attached.

I am also currently in the process of gaining NRC approval.

Declaration:

I confirm that the research will comply with [ANONYMISED]

Signature:JLKBlackwell..... **Date:** 10th December 2017.....

Please attach with this form copies of:

- CVs of researchers/ supervisors
- Submissions to relevant Ethics Committee(s) and responses
- Information sheets for participants, consent forms
- Questionnaires, interview schedules and other instruments / measures

APPENDIX 4: INFORMATION SHEET – EASY READ VERSION

Young fathers in prison project

My name is Jo and I am doing a project about dads in prison to find out what they think about being a dad. I'm from [ANONYMISED] but have lived in [ANONYMISED] for a while now. I am studying for a PhD in Law at Birkbeck University in London. My study is part-time and I also work as a website editor.

Chat

I would like to chat with you about being a dad in prison. In our chat I will ask you about:

- Your family
- Your children
- What you think it means to be a good dad

I will record the chat and write notes. You can ask to stop the recording at any time, and you don't have to answer anything you don't want to. There are no right or wrong answers.

The chat will take about one hour to one and a half hours.

Privacy

I will not use any personal info you give me, like your name, or where you live.

I will use the answers you give in the chat in my project, but this will be anonymous. This means no one will know the answers came from you. After our chat I will write notes from the recording, then the recording will be destroyed. I will be the only person with access to the notes.

You can ask for your info to be removed from the project up to six months after the chat. If you do this it will be destroyed and I will not use it in my project. If you want to do this please speak to [ANONYMISED] or one of the [ANONYMISED] team.

The chat will just be you and me but I do have a duty to protect you and others. I will have to tell a member of staff if:

- You do something that is against prison rules
- You talk about crimes that no one knows about, or ones you are planning
- You talk about hurting yourself or other people

If you are happy to chat to me, please read and sign the consent form.

More info

If you'd like some more info about the project, please speak to [ANONYMISED] or one of [ANONYMISED] on the CMS messaging system.

INFORMATION SHEET

Young fathers in prison project

Researcher: Jo Blackwell

About the project

I am researching the experiences and needs of young men in prison who are also fathers. This involves talking to dads in prison to find out what they think about being a father, how they manage their relationship with their children, and what they might need to help them both while inside and after release.

I am also looking at whether current policy meets the needs of dads in prison, and the implications of any gaps in policy.

I'm originally from [ANONYMISED] but have lived in [ANONYMISED] for a while now. I am currently studying for a PhD in Law at Birkbeck University in London. My study is part-time and I also work as a website consultant.

Informal interview

I would like to ask you to talk about your experience of being a father in prison during an informal interview. The interview will include me asking questions about your family background, your children, your views on being a father, and how you manage being a father from prison.

The interview will be recorded and written notes will also be taken during the interview. You can ask for the recording to be stopped at any time during the interview. You don't have to answer any questions that you don't want to. There are no right or wrong answers.

Interviews will take around one to one and a half hours.

Right to privacy/confidentiality

All personal information, for example, your name, names of your children, family, and friends, geographical location, information on your sentence, will be excluded from any research documentation.

I will use the answers you give in the interview for my research, but this information will be anonymous and you will not be able to be identified from anything you say. After the interview I will write notes from the recording, then the recording will be destroyed. I will be the only person with access to the notes.

Please note: there are some circumstances where I have to disclose certain information to protect you and others. These circumstances are:

- Behaviour that's against prison rules and can be adjudicated against (Rule 51, Prison Rule 1999)
- Undisclosed illegal acts (previous and planned)
- Behaviour that is harmful to you, for example intention to self-harm or commit suicide, or to others

Withdrawal of information

You can ask for your information to be withdrawn and not used in my research up to six months after the date of the interview. If you request this all data related to your interview will be destroyed, including audio recordings and written notes. Requests for withdrawal should be made to [ANONYMISED], or in his absence, a member of the [ANONYMISED] team through the CMS messaging system.

If you are willing to take part in this research, please read and sign the attached consent form.

Contact

If you require any further information either prior to or post interview, please contact [ANONYMISED] or a member of the [ANONYMISED] team through the CMS messaging system.

APPENDIX 6: INFORMATION SHEET – NON-PRISONERS VERSION

INFORMATION SHEET

Young fathers in prison project

Researcher: Jo Blackwell

About the project

I am researching the experiences and needs of young men in prison who are also fathers. This involves talking to dads in prison to find out what they think about being a father, how they manage their relationship with their children, and what they might need to help them both while inside and after release.

I am also looking at whether current policy meets the needs of dads in prison, and the implications of any gaps in policy.

I'm originally from [ANONYMISED] but have lived in [ANONYMISED] for a while now. I am currently studying for a PhD in Law at Birkbeck University in London. My study is part-time and I also work as a website consultant.

Informal interview

I would like to talk to you about your experiences of working with young fathers in prison during an informal interview. The interview will include questions about the nature of

your work, your views on how young men manage to be fathers in prison, and questions about current policies in this area and where there may be gaps.

The interview will be recorded and written notes will also be taken during the interview. You can ask for the recording to be stopped at any time during the interview. You don't have to answer any questions that you don't want to.

Interviews will take around one to one and a half hours.

Confidentiality

All personal information, for example, your name, name of your workplace, geographical location, will be excluded from any research documentation.

I will use the answers you give in the interview for my research, but this information will be anonymous and you will not be able to be identified from anything you say.

Withdrawal of information

You can ask for your information to be withdrawn up to six months after the date of the interview. If you request this all data related to your interview will be destroyed, including audio recordings and written notes. Requests for withdrawal should be made to me at [ANONYMISED].

If you are willing to take part in this research, please read and sign the attached consent form.

Contact

If you require any further information either prior to or post interview, please email me at [ANONYMISED].

APPENDIX 7: INFORMED CONSENT FORM – EASY READ VERSION CONSENT FORM

Young fathers in prison project

Student: Jo Blackwell

Contact: [ANONYMISED] or one of the [ANONYMISED] team

Please read and sign at the bottom of the form if you agree.

1. I have read and understood the details of the project
2. I have been able to ask the student any questions I had about the project
3. I give go-ahead for the chat to be recorded. I know I can ask for the recording to be turned off at any time
4. I have volunteered to do this and I know I can stop the chat at any time without saying why. I know I don't have to answer any questions I don't want to
5. I know that the information I give may be used in a report or presentation
6. I know that my name, or the names of my family and children will not be used in any report, and every effort will be made to protect my privacy
7. I know that I can say I don't want my information to be included up to six months after the chat. If I do this my information will not be used and will be destroyed
8. I know that the student has a duty to protect me and others if anything I say raises concerns about my wellbeing or the wellbeing of others, or talks about unknown or planned crimes

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Student: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX 8: INFORMED CONSENT FORM – STANDARD VERSION
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Young fathers in prison project

Researcher: Jo Blackwell

Contact details: [ANONYMISED] or one of the [ANONYMISED] team

Please read the following and sign at the bottom of the form if you agree.

1. I have read and understood the attached information sheet giving details of the project
2. I have had the opportunity to ask the researcher any questions that I had about the project and my involvement in it, and understand my role in the project
3. I give permission for the interview to be audio taped and recorded. I understand that I have the right to ask for the tape to be turned off at any point during the interview
4. My decision to consent is entirely voluntary and I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason, or to decline to answer any particular questions during the interview
5. I understand that data gathered in this project may form the basis of a report or other form of publication or presentation
6. I understand that my name, or the names of my family members, including any children, discussed during the project will not be used in any report, publication or presentation, and that every effort will be made to protect my confidentiality
7. I understand that I am free to withdraw my data up to six months after the date of the interview, and if I do this all data will be destroyed
8. I know that the researcher has a duty to protect me and others if anything I say raises concerns about my wellbeing or the wellbeing of others, or talks about undisclosed or planned crimes

Participant's signature: _____ Date:

Researcher's signature: _____ Date:

APPENDIX 9: INFORMED CONSENT FORM – NON-PRISONER VERSION

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Young fathers in prison project

Name of researcher: Jo Blackwell

Contact details: [ANONYMISED]

Please read the following and sign at the bottom of the form if you are in agreement.

1. I have read and understood the attached information sheet giving details of the project
2. I have had the opportunity to ask the researcher any questions that I had about the project and my involvement in it, and understand my role in the project
3. I give permission for the interview to be audio taped and recorded. I understand that I have the right to ask for the tape to be turned off at any point during the interview
4. My decision to consent is entirely voluntary and I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason, or to decline to answer any particular questions during the interview
5. I understand that data gathered in this project may form the basis of a report or other form of publication or presentation
6. I understand that my name, place of work, or any other identifiable personal data discussed during the project will not be used in any report, publication or presentation, and that every effort will be made to protect my confidentiality
7. I understand that I am free to withdraw my data up to six months after the date of the interview by contacting the researcher, and that if I do this all data will be destroyed

Participant's signature: _____ Date:

Researcher's signature: _____ Date:

APPENDIX 10: DEBRIEF FORM – EASY READ VERSION

Young fathers in prison project

Thank you very much for talking to me today.

I will use the answers you gave in the talk in my project, but this will be anonymous. This means no one will know the answers came from you.

I will not use any personal info, like your name, or where you live.

If you decide later you don't want me to use your answers, please speak to [ANONYMISED] or one of the [ANONYMISED] team by (DD/MM/YY).

If you don't want me to use your answers all your info, including the recording and notes, will be destroyed.

Please remember I have a duty to protect you. I will have to tell staff if I have concerns about your wellbeing, or the wellbeing of others.

If you want to talk to someone about the things we've talked about today, you can speak to:

- [ANONYMISED]
- Safer Custody
- The Chaplain

You can contact them through the CMS messaging system.

Or you can talk to the Listeners or the Samaritans on free phone.

If you would like to know more about the project, including the results, please speak to [ANONYMISED].

Thank you, Jo

APPENDIX 11: DEBRIEF FORM – STANDARD VERSION

Young fathers in prison project

Thank you for talking to me today.

I will use the answers you gave in the interview in my research, but this will be anonymous so no one will know the answers came from you.

I will not use any personal information, like your name, or where you live.

If you decide later you don't want me to use your answers, please speak to [ANONYMISED] or one of the [ANONYMISED] team by (DD/MM/YY).

If you don't want me to use your answers all your information will be destroyed. This includes the recording and any written notes.

Please remember I have a duty to protect you. I will have to tell staff if I have concerns about your wellbeing, or the wellbeing of others.

If you want to talk to someone about the things we've talked about today, you can speak to:

- [ANONYMISED]
- Safer Custody
- The Chaplain

You can contact them through the CMS messaging system.

Or you can talk to the Listeners or the Samaritans via free phone.

If you would like to know more about the project, including the results, please speak to [ANONYMISED].

Thank you, Jo

APPENDIX 12: DEBRIEF FORM – NON-PRISONER VERSION

Young fathers in prison project

Thank you for talking to me today.

I will use the answers you gave in the interview for my research, but this information will be anonymous and you will not be able to be identified from anything you say.

All personal information, for example, your name, name of your workplace, geographical location, will be excluded from any research documentation.

You can ask for your information to be withdrawn up to six months after the date of the interview.

If you request this all data relating to your interview will be destroyed, including audio recordings and written notes.

Requests for withdrawal should be made to me at [ANONYMISED] by (DD/MM/YY).

If you need any further information about the project, including the results, please do not hesitate to contact me at [ANONYMISED].

Thank you, Jo

APPENDIX 13: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview questions: DRAFT

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this research project. Please remember there are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions. If you don't want to answer a particular question just let me know. The interview is being recorded but you can ask for the recorder to be turned off at any stage of the interview.

1. Can you tell me a bit about your children?

[Prompt: How many children do you have?]

[If expectant dad: When is the baby due? Can you tell me a bit about the pregnancy, have you seen scans for example?]

2. Did you live with the child/children before you were sentenced?

[If yes: Who else lived with you and the child/children?]

[If no: How often did you see the child/children before you were sentenced?]

[Prompt: What sorts of things did you like doing with your children?]

[Skip this question if expectant dad]

3. Who looks after the child/children at the moment?

[Skip this question if expectant dad]

4. How do you get on with the children's mum/mum-to-be?

5. What do you think makes a good dad?

6. What do you think the responsibilities of being a dad are?

7. Do you think mums and dads have different roles and responsibilities?

8. How would you describe your role in your child's life before prison?

9. What contact do you have with your child/children at the moment?

10. How would you describe your role in your child's life now?

11. Tell me what it's like being a dad in prison. Is there anything that helps you to be a dad?

12. What's the biggest barrier to being a dad in prison?

13. What would you like to see more of?

14. Can you remember if anyone asked you if you were a dad, for example the police, your lawyer, the judge in your case?

15. Do you think your parenting situation was taken into account when you were sentenced?

16. Have you taken part in any parenting classes or programmes?

[If yes: what are the main things you've learnt from them?]

17. Have you thought about being a dad when you're released. Do you have any plans?

18. When you were growing up who were the important people in your life?

[Prompt: Why were they important? What did they do?]

19. Is there anything else you'd like to add about your experience of being a dad in prison?

APPENDIX 14: RECRUITMENT FLIERS

Are you a dad, stepdad, or dad-to-be?

Would you be happy to chat about what being a dad means to you?



My name is Jo and I'm doing a project about dads in prison to find out what they think about being a dad. If you're a **dad**, a **stepdad**, or a **dad-to-be** and aged **21** or under, I would love to chat with you.

Chats are in confidence and would last about an hour and a half. It would be your chance to talk about your views on being a dad and what you think would help you being a dad in prison. There are no right or wrong answers, and you won't have to answer any questions you don't want to. Chats will be recorded but you can ask for the tape to be switched off at any time.

If you'd be happy to chat and want more information please contact....



Ydych chi'n
dad, stepdad,
neu dad-i-fod?
A fydddech chi'n hapus i
sgwrsio am yr hyn y
mae tad yn ei olygu i
chi?

Fy enw i yw Jo ac rwy'n gwneud prosiect am dadau yn y carchar i ddarganfod beth maen nhw'n ei feddwl am fod yn dad. Os ydych chi'n dad, yn stepdad, neu'n dad-i-fod ac yn 21 oed neu'n iau, hoffwn sgwrsio gyda chi.

Mae sgwrsio yn gyfrinachol a byddant yn para tua awr a hanner. Byddai'n gyfle i chi siarad am eich barn am fod yn dad a'r hyn y credwch y byddai'n eich helpu chi i fod yn dad yn y carchar.

Os hoffech chi sgwrsio ac eisiau mwy o wybodaeth, cysylltwch â ...