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(Wo)men in the middle: the gendered role of supporting prisoners

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Abstract:

Prisons are, by their very nature, gendered institutions. Despite women making up a small percentage of the prison population (House of Commons Library, 2020), those supporting prisoners are generally women - especially mothers and partners (Booth and Masson, 2021; Codd, 2008). In understanding women's experiences of criminal justice, it is prudent to consider the women who are punished by the system despite not being incarcerated themselves. This chapter sheds light on these women's experiences. First, through a review of the growing international literature that illustrates how the economic and relational implications as well as the health, stigma and care for children of prisoners are overwhelmingly experienced by women in the community attempting to keep their families together. Following this, a case study showcasing the excellent work of one organisation, The Straight Path Resettlement Project (SPR) in Leicester, England, discusses Ferzana Dakri's experience of working in the community with 'BAME' Muslim women who have imprisoned loved ones. In viewing prison as sites of punishment, and appreciating how these pains extend beyond those incarcerated, this chapter draws attention to the multiple ways that women supporting prisoners are simultaneously harmed.

Keywords: Women, loved ones, prison, support, Straightpath Leicester

Introduction

Crime and punishment are gendered; international criminal justice systems (CJS) are dominated by men and underrepresented by women (Coyle et al., 2016). Likewise in England and Wales, women comprise a minority proportion of the CJS from the point of arrest (15 percent) through to conviction (27 percent) and imprisonment (5 percent) (Ministry of Justice, MoJ, 2019; see also House of Commons Library, 2020). While the number of incarcerated women has increased in recent years in England and Wales, owing to changes in areas of penal policy and sentencing legislation (Hedderman,

2012), these imbalanced gender patterns have remained consistent across time. Yet, gendered differences in the CJS do not stop here - support for prisoners is generally provided by women - especially mothers and partners. This trend is observed in previous research (Condry, 2007; Comfort, 2008; Codd, 2008; Booth, 2020), in an account provided by a prison family engagement worker who indicated that '80 percent' of people visiting one local male prison in England were women (Booth and Masson with Tynan, forthcoming), and the authors' recent Families on Remand (FOR) study (Booth and Masson, 2021). For instance, a large proportion of those supporting an imprisoned loved one¹ with experience of remand in the FOR study were female; 47 of the 61 interviewed. Of these, 36 self-identified as either a partner² or mother³, meaning that the disruption, stress and burden experienced by those in the community was predominantly assumed by women (Masson and Booth, forthcoming).

Explorations into the wider social inequalities associated with imprisonment are increasing (Murray, 2006; Western and Wideman, 2009; Hagan and Foster, 2015). Emerging as part of this body of work is significant evidence that imprisonment creates 'referred pains of imprisonment' (Lanskey et al, 2018) or 'symbiotic harms' (Condry and Minson, 2020) for loved ones. This literature not only demonstrates the emotional distress caused by imprisonment, but also the repercussions on other areas of family life including finances and domestic arrangements (Arditti, 2012; Booth, 2020) as well as stigma and shame (in relation to Black and Ethnic Minority ('BAME'⁴) women please see Haidat, Bibi and Haidat, forthcoming). For those choosing to support incarcerated loved ones, challenges are exacerbated as they must also navigate their relationships around the CJS. This includes court processes during remand (Booth and Masson, 2020) and barriers to visiting because of geography or times (Loucks, 2005; Comfort, 2008).

¹ The term 'loved ones' was used to account for the diverse sample of people supporting a remanded person, as interviewed in this qualitative study were a range of people from partners and spouses, to blood relatives such as parents, grandparents, siblings and aunts, as well as friends - see Masson and Booth (2018).

² This included one ex-partner whose son's father was in prison.

³ This included biological, foster, and step mothers - see Masson and Booth (forthcoming).

⁴ Please see Chapter 13 regarding issues with this terminology.

Given those providing support for prisoners are predominantly women, the gendered, diverse, and multiple harms of imprisonment for such women who have, themselves, committed no infractions and are not incarcerated, is worthy of attention. They are forced to navigate their lives, relationships, commitments and caregiving responsibilities around the CJS as 'women in the middle' (Brody, 2004). While not specific to prisoners' loved ones, this concept indicates how in contemporary society, women's care of others increases demands on their time, resources, and emotions, placing them *in the middle* of the complex web of family relationships and responsibilities. For instance, the previously mentioned body of research suggests that women provide support to prisoners regardless of the gender of the imprisoned person. Given the prison population in England and Wales stands at just under 80,000 (MoJ and HMPPS, 2021), this results in many thousands of women assuming this role. As will be discussed later, the disproportionality of Muslim prisoners also brings into sharp focus that beneath these statistics lies a further ignored group of loved ones that researchers often struggle to capture the experiences of. Furthermore, understanding the experiences of women in this position is particularly critical given that the current penal policy climate in England and Wales has identified relational ties as key for reducing re-offending (Home Office, 2004; Farmer, 2017; 2019). While supportive relationships can aid those incarcerated both during and post custody, several academics are critical of the ways in which this discourse and practice deposits responsibility on loved ones with little, if any, consideration of their social circumstances and needs (for example, Codd, 2008; Jardine, 2018; Booth, 2021; Masson and Booth, forthcoming).

This chapter will discuss the many ways in which imprisonment is experienced by loved ones by reviewing the extant, international literature in this growing field of study. The focus lies with the economic and relational implications as well as the health, stigma and children of prisoners, and how these issues are overwhelmingly experienced by women in the community attempting to keep their families together. The discussion will then consider how and why the identification of this gendered trend of support is reflective of social expectations of femininity, and the harms that may result from this for the women burdened by this role and associated responsibilities. Finally the chapter includes a case study that showcases the excellent work of one English organisation, The Straight Path Resettlement Project (SPR) in Leicester. This

final section outlines the importance of projects like this, and demonstrates how gendered initiatives that offer support to loved ones of prisoners can produce far-reaching benefits for individuals, relationships, and communities.

Impact of imprisonment on loved ones

While an early study in England and Wales by Morris (1965) shed light on the hardships experienced by prisoner's families, until recently there was agreement in the literature that research in this field was conducted on the 'forgotten' victims of incarceration (Light and Campbell, 1997). However, the notable surge in studies exploring the impact of imprisonment on loved ones in the last decade has led to increased attention for this population. This is likely reflective of punitive penal policies, and the associated increase in incarceration rates, which have resulted in more interest in the 'collateral effects' of prison on individuals, communities and wider society, including prisoner's loved ones (Hagan and Dinovitzer, 1999). It is suggested that these 'collateral effects' are far reaching, and that it is women who are overwhelmingly left attempting to support and maintain relationships.

The existing literature shows how the impact on loved ones is varied; Turney and Wildeman (2013, p.3) note that incarceration 'sometimes undermines family life, sometimes improves it, and sometimes has no effect on it'. This is likely because some factors act to alleviate (moderators) or exacerbate (mediators) the experiences of loved ones (Murray et al., 2014). On the one hand, moderators tend to precede imprisonment which can indicate either vulnerability or resilience by loved ones, such as family economic positionality, gender, support from welfare policies and/or voluntary organisations⁵. On the other hand, mediators are the 'mechanisms' within which risk factors are produced, including social stigmatisation, offence type and/or prison regimes. Condry and Sharff-Smith (2018, p.10) indicate how research with prisoner's loved ones can struggle to 'distinguish between these...interwoven and closely interrelated' facets that comprise the experience of incarceration. This is because this area of research is complex, nuanced and fluid. Indeed, some have identified the positive effects of incarceration for loved ones in situations where there

⁵ In England and Wales the voluntary sector plays a central role in supporting loved ones impacted by imprisonment.

have been issues with children's safety (Codd, 2008) and the person imprisoned was misusing substances and/or abusive (Shaw, 1987; Wakefield and Wildeman, 2014). The latter is particularly important given the overwhelming gender dynamic with women as victims of domestic and interpersonal violence (WHO, 2021). Yet, most literature focuses on prison's disruptive elements, especially for loved ones who continue to support and remain in contact with prisoners. Thus, the literature review in this chapter, while not exhaustive, primarily indicates the adverse implications of imprisonment for loved ones, and how these disproportionately affect women.

Economic and relational implications

Economic and material challenges tend to vary based on what moderators exist in loved ones' lives, household compositions, and family units pre-custody. However, many in prison come from socially disadvantaged backgrounds (Jardine, 2018) and so it is not a great leap to suggest their loved ones share similar circumstances. Likewise, the imprisonment of a breadwinner or person contributing financially to the household - whether through legal or illegal means - reduces families' financial resources (Codd, 2008). This may require those in the community to further contribute economically by increasing or re-establishing paid work which, in turn, might alter caregiving responsibilities when there are dependents in the household or family unit (Booth, 2020). Please see Hadait, Bibi and Hadait (forthcoming) regarding the barriers faced by 'BAME' women attempting to engage in paid labour as a result of limited levels of English and prior work experience. Finally, supporting an imprisoned person can be accompanied by significant financial costs when there are fewer funds from which to draw. For instance, in England and Wales loved ones foot the bill for visiting, such as transport costs to and from prison visits and canteen costs, and sending money for phone credit to enable telephone contact (Loucks, 2005).

Such financial repercussions can alter or strain relationships between those in prison and their loved ones. Relational challenges can also continue following re-entry, with one Chinese study finding that the re-establishment of new routines for imprisoned fathers and their children created ambiguity surrounding the father's role and identity both following separation and on reunification (Chui, 2016). This ambiguity is likely to be very hard for the mothers involved to attempt to navigate, as they are torn between supporting both partner/husband as well as their children during this difficult process.

Health, stigma and children of prisoners

Economic and relational changes following incarceration might also cause a reduction in loved ones' own health and wellbeing. Some studies found that the emotional loss and stress that accompanies the initial period of separation through imprisonment is akin to bereavement for children (Bockneck *et al*, 2009) and loved ones (Chui, 2010; Booth, 2020). Others found correlations between parental imprisonment and infant mortality (Wakefield and Wildeman, 2014) as well as parental incarceration as a risk factor for obesity with women (Roettger and Boardman, 2012).

Several have written about the stigmatisation that prisoner's loved ones experience (Condry, 2007; Nesmith and Ruhland, 2008; Kotova, 2020) and the resultant social exclusion. Several studies have revealed how children attempt to keep their parent's imprisonment a secret from both peers and adults in their community and schools (Boswell and Wedge, 2002; Nesmith and Ruhland, 2008). According to Knudsen (2018) this lack of transparency about childrens' familial situation and the struggles because of separation from their imprisoned parent(s) results in their 'systemic invisibility' (please see Jones, 2021). This secrecy is linked to fears of stigma and discrimination owing to the negative label attached to the imprisoned parent - their spoiled identity (Goffman, 1963) - contaminating or being attributed to the child. Booth (2020, p.15) also conceptualised caregivers to children of imprisoned mothers in the UK as occupying a 'disenfranchised social status' because of the lack of formal recognition and support in social policy and provisions when assuming these childcare responsibilities. As women generally care for children when a parent is imprisoned, stigma ascribed to children and families following imprisonment has gendered implications. Linked to this, Comfort (2008) suggested that stigma occurred as part of the 'secondary prisonization' female partners of male prisoners experienced in the US owing to derogatory prison rules. As argued later, and in other chapters (see Chapters 13, 17 and 19), this shame and stigma is particularly acute within certain groups of loved ones, for example those from 'BAME' backgrounds.

Given the diverse ways that incarceration can affect, predominantly female, loved ones, there is a pressing need to continue researching and questioning how the administration of penal punishment is experienced by women supporting prisoners.

This examination is necessary whether or not carceral punishment is justified for the prisoner as these explorations consider the rights and experiences of people not personally incarcerated for criminal offences (Booth, 2020; Condry and Minson, 2020). We propose that lines of enquiry and further discussion considering the harms brought to women supporting an incarcerated person are required, and it is to these gendered implications which are turned to now.

The gendered role of supporting prisoners

Historically women have been relegated to, or associated with, the domestic sphere. Women's links with the home, the family, and with caregiving responsibilities occur because dominant heteropatriarchal ideologies have perpetuated assumptions and expectations around femininity and motherhood (Evans and Jamieson, 2009). While we have moved away from the female homemaker role and 'male breadwinner model' that represented the post-war welfare state (1940s-1950s) following the second wave of feminism (1960s-1980s), the restructuring of family practices and gendered roles have shifted significantly (Williams, 2004). One notable example is women's increased participation in the labour market. However, research suggests that women have remained the dominant figure in the household, particularly with regards to caregiving (Craig, 2006; UN Women, 2020, please see Chapter 42). Consequently, we see women juggling both employment commitments with caregiving responsibilities for young, less-abled and older relatives, and subsequently positioned as 'women in the middle' (Brody, 2004). Given these wider social trends it is perhaps not surprising that women are the main persons providing support and care to prisoners, and their dependents (such as children with incarcerated mothers).

Importantly, it is not *only* women who assume caregiving responsibilities in society and/or provide support to those in prison as many men also contribute in meaningful ways to their personal, familial and parental relationships. Likewise, many prisoners do not have contact with loved ones denoted by low visiting numbers (HMCIP, 2020), and some women may decide - for various reasons - not to 'stand by their man' during their incarceration (Codd, 2008). Yet, when discussing the role of women in this context we are identifying trends presented in research which indicate that the lion's

share of this unpaid and challenging work falls to women. This includes grappling with the above-mentioned financial, emotional, relational, practical and domestic issues.

Gendered trends

Caring for and assisting prisoners is a 'gendered activity' (Codd, 2011, p.46) which is supported by research in the UK (McDermott and King, 1992; Devlin, 2002; Condry, 2007; Jardine, 2018; Booth, 2020) and in the US (Shafer, 1994; Girshick, 1996; Comfort, 2003). Given the implications of imprisonment for loved ones that were outlined previously, we can begin to appreciate the multifaceted and significant harms that may be experienced by women through their positionality and decision to support an incarcerated person. In addition to this, Condry's (2007) research with relatives of those convicted of serious offences in England suggested that some of the implications may be more severe for women. For instance, Condry identified a gendered stigma whereby women (especially mothers) were blamed for the actions of men owing to their kin relationships and the identification of issues relating to the family and home as women's responsibility. Expectations and pressures placed on these women - whether external or internal - meant that the challenges of supporting their imprisoned relative became their 'primary occupation' (Condry, 2007, p.55; please see Masson and Booth, forthcoming). These findings have synergy with Comfort's research in the US (2008) whereby visiting spaces at a male prison were found to be a 'distinctly female space' and Shafer's (2004) study that reported that twice as many mothers as fathers were prison visitors.

As well as supporting prisoners, women also care for children of prisoners. An often quoted statistic indicates that when a father is imprisoned, 90 percent of children are cared for by their mothers (Scharff Smith and Gampell, 2011). Often this primary care will have been provided by the mother pre-custody, but for many this will be the first time they are looking after their children alone and/or without the financial support of the fathers. Likewise, when a mother is imprisoned, a large proportion of children are cared for by female relatives. Despite being 25 years old, the most comprehensive survey of imprisoned women in England and Wales (Caddle and Crisp, 1997) found that most of their children were being looked after by grandmothers and female relatives. Concurring with this, a more recent but smaller qualitative study (Booth, 2020) similarly found caregiving to be a female role during maternal imprisonment.

However, this study also found that these gendered caregiving trends were far-reaching and affecting 'doubly invisible children' comprised of the caregiver's own children under 18 years of age who lived in the same household, and caregivers' adult children and grandchildren. Not only does this show how women providing this care are positioned in the *middle* of a web of family responsibilities (Brody, 2004), but it also suggests that the estimated numbers of children impacted by imprisonment - 17,000 in England and Wales (Kincaid, Roberts and Kane, 2019) - is too conservative. Appreciating the significant body of literature that shows how caregiving and support is markedly gendered in family units following imprisonment has important implications for policy.

Policy implications

Alongside the growing academic interest exploring the experiences and effects of imprisonment on loved ones of prisoners, there has also been increasing policy attention. For instance, in England and Wales, recognition of the children and families was centred and cemented in policy-making when they were identified as one of the seven pathways to reduce reoffending (National Offender Management Service, 2009). Thereafter they have been repeatedly cited as a key 'resettlement agency' (HMIP, 2016) as the link between supportive relational ties during custody and on release was linked to improved chances of curbing recidivism. One well-cited study reported that prisoners receiving visits from family members were 39 percent less likely to reoffend than those not receiving visits (May, Sharma and Stewart, 2008). Unsurprisingly, data of this nature resulted in more political interest in the relational ties of prisoners and in 2017 Lord Farmer was commissioned by the MoJ to review this area, publishing 'The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners' Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime'⁶.

It is suggested that this review, and the associated policy interest, meant a closer examination of, and increased pressure on, women's supportive and caregiving roles to prisoners. Several academics have questioned whether this is appropriate or indeed even properly acknowledged. Halsey and Deegan (2015) suggest caution given that

⁶ This was followed up, as a recommendation from the Female Offender Strategy (MoJ, 2018), by a later report in 2019, which explored the role of relationships for women who have offended, and stressed an even stronger relationship between recidivism for women and their links with others.

the evidence clearly shows how women are already grappling with several hardships in their lives. Booth (2018) is critical of this approach owing to the lack of information about those supporting prisoners, for instance, despite the literature highlighting the gendered harms, the government makes no effort to establish the numbers, social circumstances, needs and vulnerabilities of women in this position. Likewise, Codd (2008) has concerns that relational ties are being used instrumentally by successive governments whilst the same government's responsibilities offer little official support or provisions. Instead, in England and Wales voluntary sector organisations attempt to fill this void (Power, 2021).

Voluntary sector organisations

As demonstrated by several chapters in this Handbook (see Chapters 13 and 42), the voluntary sector does some incredible work with prisoners and those affected by imprisonment. However, because this is often locally coordinated rather than being nationally available, there is a 'postcode lottery' (Raikes, 2016, p.4). Charities are either contracted to provide family services in prisons (such as Pact - see Power, 2021, and Booth and Masson with Tynan, forthcoming), or rely on charitable donations or small grants to work more locally (such as Himaya Haven, please see Hadait, Bibi and Hadait (forthcoming), and the Straight Path Resettlement Project (SPR) - as discussed below). This means that funding streams are inconsistent and unreliable, and that some geographical areas have much less provision. Nonetheless, the nuanced knowledge acquired by these organisations about the realities of imprisonment - and supporting a prisoner from the community - means they are well placed to support women *in the middle*. As such, this chapter now draws on Ferzana Dakri's (Family Support Community Chaplain, SPR), practitioner experiences of working with Muslim women from 'BAME' communities who were supporting an imprisoned relative (Khidmah Organisation, 2021).

The support offered by and challenges faced by The Straight Path Resettlement Project, Leicester

The project was originally launched by Khidmah Organisation in 2017 to address the absence of specialist support for those returning to the Leicester, England, community after prison. In particular, this project drew on evidence that culture competent

interventions were critical for the successful resettlement and integration of Muslim individuals leaving prison, and for supporting their loved ones in the community. SPR is the only registered community chaplaincy⁷ resettlement project in Leicester supporting this group⁸, and it recognises the overlap of faith and culture and how these are closely intertwined (Community Chaplaincy, 2021). The importance of faith-based community chaplaincies cannot be overestimated and is recognised by HMPPS on the Faith Partnership Framework (Gov.uk, 2021). SPR provides a wide variety of different support, for example being the conduit for the service user referred to by prison chaplaincies, partner agencies, probation and community rehabilitation companies as well as translation of criminal justice documents for those whose first language is not English. It is felt that faith congregations, women's support groups, and small gatherings give way to instigate conversations, share information about the holistic support SPR can offer. As a community chaplaincy, the resettlement project is open to all, however, the primary focus remains on those of the Muslim faith background.

Once operationalised it was important to raise awareness about the SPR project to ensure that people knew that a culturally sensitive resettlement project was working in the heart of the community. Families and prisoners needed to know that they could reach out to fully trained family and faith support chaplains who would be able to understand, support and relate through heritage and culture. Word of mouth and the power of signposting of the project proved incredibly important for women in need.

Ferzana's experiences

Accessing a female family chaplain has allowed the familiarity and connection for families with regards to pastoral care and guidance, on sensitive and personal matters and honouring that need, whether religiously affiliated or otherwise. For Ferzana, being of the same faith as those engaging with the project means she can pick up and understand visible signs, sympathise and contextualise. This has helped to bring into the open experiences and concerns to ensure that they do not remain unsaid and

⁷ Community chaplaincies are independent faith based voluntary organisations providing resettlement support and mentoring for people leaving prison. Community chaplaincies usually start their work in prison or in the community and meet the individual and provide on-going support in the community for as long as needed.

⁸ However it should be noted that in 2021 the project reach expanded to support service users from Newcastle to Southampton even though the project remit is specifically for the East Midlands. Declining to support those in need is not a choice.

hidden. A synergy of faith and culture can help to break down barriers when working with people of the same faith who would either struggle or feel apprehensive asking for help.

Ferzana reveals how those supported by the SPR shared their feelings and the challenges they faced as they went through the CJS, as well as the impact of imprisonment on their loved ones. Their experiences are evidence of the devastating impact imprisonment continues to have on Muslim families. Muslim men in prison make up a disproportionate percentage of the prison system. 17 percent of the prison population in England and Wales identify as Muslim (MoJ, 2021), which is significantly out of line with the general population (Statistica, 2021). This inevitably means that many thousands of families are impacted through the domino effect of 'secondary imprisonment', which compounds the impact on resettlement support organisations like SPR. Ferzana contends that this secondary imprisonment is incredibly gendered:

“Women take on the role of their male counterparts during imprisonment and often put their lives on hold while they go on autopilot to look after their families. They are left with a vacuum of feelings that are never expressed due to stigma, shame and unaware of where or who to talk to for information. Trust is also a large factor for them, who can you talk to without being judged or talked about?” (Ferzana).

Despite shared common factors such as faith, ethnicity, heritage and culture, there remain barriers for Muslim women to open up and talk about their experiences. The element of trust was a major factor where families felt they needed to feel safe and assured that once they opened up, their voices would be protected. Overcoming shame and taboo and then taking measured steps to trust someone who could identify with what they were going through was a struggle.

“I recall a Muslim woman who was referred to me; her son was serving a lengthy sentence. It took her four months to make contact from the point of referral. When we finally met, she explained that she could not understand why someone would want to help another Muslim service user; she thought her personal experiences would be shared with the community and she felt a sense of mistrust making the first step in making contact despite sharing the same culture and background. Once we passed

this barrier, the mother shared, 'I feel relieved that I was able to talk to someone. It has taken me such a long time'" (Ferzana).

A common type of support for those engaging with SPR is the provision of emotional support in a non-judgmental and safe space. The family support chaplain who works at the SPR offers family-based interventions to women in the community, such as counselling, mental health support (as a qualified Mental Health First Aider⁹), listening, information, advice guidance, emotional support, prison contact support and welfare benefits. Having someone to talk to in a neutral, safe space with a human element - rather than in a clinical void - is vital to successful outreach work. It is argued that prison desensitises its inhabitants and families but that there is spiritual healing from a person sharing the same faith.

Once families feel comfortable opening up, Ferzana has found that women share deep emotions relating to a wide range of concerns. They have described the confusion of how the CJS worked, the process of sentencing, the first night in prison, worries when not hearing from their loved ones and the impact of the separation upon them and their families. For example, Amina shared how the incarceration of her son simply highlighted how isolated she was from both her family and community. There was no expectation of support, she alone struggled with her son's imprisonment.

"My family has never been there for me from the beginning so I had no familial support whilst my son was in prison. As for the community, they have never been there for me. I have had to manage on my own" (Amina - Mother of son aged 22 who had served 6 years 6 months).

Likewise, for Yasmeen, her eldest son's incarceration meant she was also isolated from her community, linking back to Condry's (2007) finding, she expressed frustration at being punished for something she had not done:

⁹ Please visit the following website for more information: <https://mhfaengland.org/>

“Life on the outside is harder, having to deal with the judgment and stigmatisation of them (being in prison) when we have done nothing wrong whatsoever” (Yasmeen - Mother of son currently serving sentence at a YOI).

Communities can often quickly turn and distance themselves from families of prisoners. SPR continues to offer emotional and befriending support, building relationships with families. However, for Ferzana there are often barriers and limitations to community engagement when news spreads of a family member in prison. As seen in Amina and Yasmeen’s experiences, communities are sometimes unforgiving and unaccepting of former prisoners and families. The stigma and shame associated with imprisonment often continues post-custody. Ferzana has seen how the women’s ‘job’ of supporting these prisoners does not end when the punishment supposedly ends. Yet shared commonality provided by the project can help. For example, for Salma this isolation was reduced by others in her community who had also experienced a loved ones incarceration, this shared commonality or identity meant she no longer had to carry the burden alone.

“It’s a relief when you find Muslim women in your locality...You build up a trustable relationship because you’re going through the same experiences of imprisonment” (Salma - wife of a prisoner).

Summary

This chapter has argued that despite advancements in our understanding of the issues, there remains many pains of imprisonment experienced by prisoner’s loved ones in the community. As Ferzana has argued *“universally families are the secondary victims of imprisonment – there has never been more women and families serving their own sentences on the other side of the prison bars”*. These issues are far reaching, for example in relation to finances, relationships, health, stigma and children of prisoners. Importantly this chapter has demonstrated how, in most cases, these pains and challenges facing prisoner’s loved ones are gendered. Even when these issues do not immediately appear to be specific to women, through the very nature of the way in which women overwhelmingly pick up the pieces of keeping a family together when a loved one is incarcerated, they become gendered issues. This is

reflective of social norms and expectations in which women are positioned in domestic and caregiving roles why many women can have limited agency to reach out for help.

Discussed in this chapter is the Straight Path Resettlement Project (SPR) in Leicester, drawing on the practitioner experiences of Ferzana Dakri. SPR is a small project supporting 'BAME' communities affected by prison, including the prisoners themselves and their families, and has tailored their provision as the majority of those they are providing support to in the community are women. Likewise, in recognition of the religious needs of those they support, they have forged links with the community and faith groups to create awareness of the issues. Ferzana's experiences indicate the need for trusting, non-judgement relationships for women who might otherwise have experienced multiple forms of hardship and stigma as a result of the incarceration of a loved one. We argue that SPR is a shining beacon of how organisations can consider how gender is entrenched in the vital work they do in the community, and how initiatives can be tailored to benefit so many women with experience of the CJS.

While policy interest in the relational ties of people in prison has grown in recent years in England and Wales, it is voluntary organisations who play a key role in supporting these women. Much of this is to do with cultural competence, grassroots reach, visibility and trust. The case study presented in this chapter of the SPR project is just one example of this good practice. Yet it is suggested that further steps need to be taken, especially at policy level, to acknowledge and respond to the research and practitioner evidence that so clearly shows these gendered pains of imprisonment. It is women who remain in the middle, attempting to navigate their familial relationships around a problematic CJS which continues to ignore their needs and vulnerabilities. While not having committed any infractions themselves, these women are still significantly harmed, causing them to have adverse experiences of the CJS.

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