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Still Forgotten? The Juggling Act of Remand Imprisonment on Maternal Figures

Natalie Booth ^{1,*} and Isla Masson ²

¹ Department of Criminology, School of Social Sciences, Bath Spa University, Bath BA2 9BN, UK

² Social Policy and Criminology, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, The Open University, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA, UK; isla.masson@open.ac.uk

* Correspondence: n.booth@bathspa.ac.uk

Abstract

Remand custody has received little academic or policy attention, despite being a form of punishment that removes an individual immediately into prison for an unknown duration. While there has been growing international attention on prisoners' children and families, the punitive impact of remand is 'still forgotten'. Responding to this gap, 61 semi-structured interviews were conducted with loved ones (i.e., partners, parents, and friends) supporting a person in prison on remand in England and Wales. Data collected in 2018 and 2019 were then coded and thematically analysed. This paper focuses specifically on the juggling act that 16 mothers and grandmothers (as maternal figures) undertook as they engaged in 'family practices' to balance their own needs against those of other family members, including those in the community and their remanded adult (grand)children. Four subthemes exploring prison conditions and healthcare, violence, mental health, and supporting other family members are discussed, which sit within an overarching theme that found disrupted maternal practices and a lack of control. This article concludes that because remand is distinct, so are the experiences of maternal figures, necessitating nuanced support and further research and policy attention, so that remand experiences are no longer forgotten.

Keywords: familial imprisonment; families; voice; wellbeing; needs-based support

1. Introduction

Many decades have passed since the original contribution by Morris (1965) on the impact that prison has on families and children of prisoners in England and Wales. Indeed, there has been an impressive body of international research that has outlined the hardships, disruptions, and harms caused to families when they experience the loss of their loved one to prison (for example, Comfort 2003; Condry 2007; Codd 2008; Jardine 2018; Cooper et al. 2025). The importance of supportive family ties has similarly been acknowledged in several government documents in England and Wales (e.g., National Offender Management Service (NOMS 2009); HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP 2016)), and especially through the Ministry of Justice (MoJ)-commissioned reviews led by Lord Farmer (2017, 2019), which recommended that families should be the 'golden thread' in prisons. Despite this, prisoners' children and families are characterised as a 'forgotten' group (Light and Campbell 2007; Cooper and Taylor 2023), and it is argued here that this invisibility is seen to a greater extent during remand custody. There is very little academic

Academic Editor: James O. Finckenauser

Received: 11 December 2025

Revised: 26 February 2026

Accepted: 4 March 2026

Published: 17 March 2026

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research on remand (Anderson et al. 2021; Dhami and van den Brink 2022; Lönnqvist 2023), and to the best of the authors' knowledge, there is no prior focus on the impact of remand incarceration on families and children (or 'loved ones', as is our preferred term to capture the array of people choosing to support a person in prison, Masson and Booth 2018), beyond our own research (Booth and Masson 2021; Masson and Booth 2022, 2024). Therefore, this paper sheds light on the experiences of a group of loved ones, those supporting a person on remand, composed of maternal figures (e.g., biological mothers, step mothers, foster mothers, and grandmothers), who are still forgotten.

Research with families of prisoners has recurrently identified that support is gendered, as women predominantly engage in emotional, practical, and financial support to incarcerated individuals (Comfort 2003; Condry 2007; Codd 2008). Similarly, sociological research exploring contemporary motherhood identifies how caretaking practices are gendered, with ideological and social expectations placing pressures on women and creating increased gendered disparities in familial and social networks (for example, see Hays 1996). Several maternal figures in the current study were the main, and often only, persons to visit and support the remanded individual, whilst also maintaining existing maternal roles with other relatives in the community. This may be explained by a notion of 'intensive mothering', which requires mothers to be 'all giving to their children' (Milkie and Peltola 1999, p. 480), with selflessness being central to ensuring that devotion to others is prioritised (Blair-Loy 2003). Morgan's (2011) theory of 'family practices' is an appropriate analytical framework in this article, as the theory acknowledges how family engagement and boundaries are emphasised through the 'doing' or 'action' of routine 'practices' by individuals. Performing these practices is a mechanism of communication that conveys a person's status within a family, whilst also acknowledging the fluidity of relationships in ever-changing circumstances. This is a particularly useful theoretical lens when exploring disrupted maternal practices, as maternal figures juggled and sought to maintain some control of their familial responsibilities during a very uncertain and adverse set of experiences encapsulating their adult (grand)children's remand.

The Experience of Remand Custody

Remand is a criminal justice process where individuals are held in prisons by the courts, either pre-trial or pre-sentencing, under the 1976 Bail Act in England and Wales. Removal into prison on remand is immediate, for an unknown duration, making this punishment distinct from the experience of sentenced prisoners (Heard and Fair 2019). Many of those entering prison custody in England and Wales are remanded; with remand making up 70% of first receptions in 2024, while 20% of the total prison population were on remand in June 2025, compared to 11% in June 2019 (MoJ 2025b). Despite this, 'remand is intended to be used as a last resort' (House of Commons Justice Committee 2023, p. 4) because, as Lönnqvist (2023, p. 1) describes, it is the 'most intrusive procedural measure in modern criminal justice systems'. The threshold for remand relates to risk, harm, and personal circumstances (Sentencing Council 2021; JUSTICE 2023), meaning remand can be issued for their 'own protection', for example, if they have mental health issues, or if they present a risk in relation to their accused crime severity. Evidence suggests that magistrates can take very little time, on average, just 17 min in one study (JUSTICE 2023), to hear evidence before making the decision to remand or bail, despite this judicial decision to imprison having extremely significant implications for the individual and their loved ones. For example, being on remand increases the likelihood of losing stable employment and accommodation and places pressure on family and community ties (Gelsthorpe and Padfield 2022).

As the authors have argued previously, 'although remand can be a matter of days, this unsettling 'in limbo' period can last a significant amount of time' (Masson and Booth

2023, p. 3). House of Commons Justice Committee (2022) data suggests that the previous estimated average of 209 days on remand (National Audit Office 2021) is now an underestimate in England and Wales—especially given that the COVID-19 pandemic intensified the existing delays/bottleneck for courts to hear cases involving remanded prisoners (Booth and Masson 2021; House of Commons Justice Committee 2025). Therefore, the impact of remand is potentially ‘more extensive and far-reaching as growing numbers experience remand either directly as prisoners or indirectly as loved ones supporting them’ (Masson and Booth 2024, p. 4). The growing remand population in England and Wales has also placed pressure on the prison estate, which is already heavily overcrowded (House of Commons Justice Committee 2023; UK Parliament 2024). It was initially discouraging that remand was not considered in the Independent Sentencing Review (ISR 2025) commissioned by the Labour administration to respond to the prison overcrowding ‘crisis’; this was an opportunity to critically review criminal justice policies and practices that might be inflating the remand population. However, there is some hope that the proposed introduction of a package of amendments to the 1976 (Bail Act 1976) under the Sentencing Bill might ‘reduce the prison remand population, while still ensuring public protection’ partially through greater provision of the ‘no real prospect’ (of prison) test (MoJ 2025a). The outcome might be a reduced remand population, as this approach is intended to dovetail with another key change regarding a ‘presumption against short sentences’ and could mitigate some of the net-widening seen with recent remand decisions and practices for individuals convicted of less serious offences. These amendments are welcomed, as they could result in fewer individuals experiencing the challenges and associated harms of remand.

The experience of remand is unique because of the ‘uncertainty’ while the person is awaiting their court hearing and/or sentencing, and is therefore unsure how long they will spend in prison. Elsewhere, findings from the authors’ study (Masson and Booth 2024) conceptualised this ‘in limbo’ experience as an ‘ambiguous loss’ (Boss 1977) because of the emotional and psychological impact that this has on loved ones during remand. In addition, those on remand do not have access to the same support opportunities as sentenced prisoners (Catch 22 2023; JUSTICE 2023). Their access to employability support and educational courses is often reduced, and sometimes nonexistent, while many services, for instance, substance misuse or mental health services, prioritise clients based on release date, which is not something remand prisoners have been issued (ibid; House of Commons Justice Committee 2025). Being on remand is also a risk factor for suicide in custody (Zhong et al. 2021), with many having mental health problems, but unable to access mental health care in prison (House of Commons Justice Committee 2023). This significantly disadvantages people on remand, despite having potentially more acute needs and vulnerabilities to the wider prison population (Masson and Booth 2022). Most remand prisoners in the male estate are held in Category B prisons, which are local establishments serving the courts, often located in inner-city locations. These local prisons are recurrently reported to be more chaotic environments, with higher levels of violence, drug use, and self-harm (for example, HMIP 2025a, 2025b). Again, this provides a very distinct prison experience, which may be more mentally and physically challenging than in other areas of the male prison estate, and may shape experiences, needs, and relationships with supportive loved ones in the community.

When considering the impact of remand, it is important to consider gender-specific issues, given the high percentage of female prisoners on remand. The female estate has seen a significant increase in remand in recent years, with 23% of the population being on remand in June 2025 (MoJ 2025c). High female remand populations have been explained by the overuse of practices to hold women in custody ‘for their own protection’ when displaying mental health issues (Gelsthorpe and Padfield 2022; Independent Monitoring

Boards 2023) rather than receiving provisions and dedicated support through other routes in the community (MoJ 2018). Worrying practices such as this prompted a joint letter to The Rt Hon David Lammy MP (Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice) in November 2025, urging the Government to make use of the opportunity to make legislation changes while drafting the Sentencing Bill. It will be interesting to see if the proposed changes, such as the previously mentioned ‘no real prospect test’, will also facilitate different outcomes for women displaying mental health needs. There are additional gender-specific issues with regard to remanding women in prison that relate to the smaller female prison estate and the increased likelihood that women are held further from their homes and loved ones (Gelsthorpe and Padfield 2022). Thus, when considering remand practices across both the female and male estate, it is important to consider what impact prison operations, environments, policies, and practices have on the experience of remand for loved ones in the community, and especially maternal figures assuming the lion’s share of this responsibility to support those incarcerated for unknown periods of time.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design and Ethics

The Families on Remand (FOR) study was conducted in England and Wales by the two authors and funded by The Oakdale Trust. Before commencement, ethical approval was gained from both researchers’ universities. As both researchers have experience in conducting research on people in contact with the criminal justice system (Masson 2019; Booth 2020), careful ethical practices were woven through all stages of the research process, from design, the identification, recruitment, and interview of participants, through to analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of findings. This qualitative study explored the experiences of loved ones of people who were or had been remanded into prison custody. The research objectives guiding the project were as follows:

- (1) To critically examine the circumstances, processes, and decisions surrounding their relative’s remand from the perspectives of family members, including arrest, court experiences, and contact with legal professionals;
- (2) To identify how family members respond to the remand of their relative into prison custody, with particular focus on their attitudes and experiences of their:
 - o Caregiving responsibilities (if the remanded relative is a parent or carer)
 - o Domestic situation(s);
 - o Financial and work circumstance(s);
 - o Emotional and mental health;
- (3) To explore if family members have been in contact with the remanded relative, and their experiences of maintaining their relationships during this period of detainment;
- (4) To explore what role families have played with regard to preparations for their relative’s release from custody.

2.2. Recruitment and Sampling

Participants were recruited in three English prison visitors’ centres: two male and one female. A non-probability sampling method was adopted to identify and include all eligible participants who self-identified as being a loved one of a person who was currently, or who had previously, been in prison on remand. All potential participants were initially approached about the project and given the opportunity to read or have the participant information sheet read to them and to have any questions about the research answered by the researchers. Potential participants were encouraged to take time to consider

taking part in the research, and the researchers stressed that there would be no negative repercussions to them or their loved ones if they did not participate. Once consent was obtained, participants were reminded that they could skip any questions or pause, or withdraw from the research during or after the interview, again with no repercussions to themselves or their loved ones.

2.3. Data Collection

The interviews were carried out in 2018 and 2019 and were semi-structured in nature and guided by an interview schedule (split up into the following headings: general demographics; wider remand experiences; family life; contact and relationships; and progression/release) to ensure, where possible, consistency between both researchers and to mirror the research objectives. As is often the way in qualitative research, the interviews were not generally linear, but the schedule facilitated focus on specific areas which pertained to the research questions, while also being flexible to explore interesting areas participants discussed (Bryman 2012). Most interviews ($n = 59$) took place in a prison visitor centre, but flexibility was given around the needs and wishes of participants who preferred to be interviewed at home, and lasted between 30 and 90 min, averaging 60 min. This duration provided opportunities for rapport and trust to be established, and the collection of rich, thick data, improving the dependability of the findings (Lincoln and Guba 1985). With the permission of participants (provided in the consent form), interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The final sample of 61 loved ones consisted of those supporting at least one individual who had been remanded pre-trial or remanded awaiting sentencing (some were able to reflect on experiences supporting different remanded loved ones). Therefore, at the time of the interview, some of those being supported were on remand, while others had received a custodial sentence post remand. The sample was represented by several different family members (including partners, parents, grandparents, aunts/uncles, and siblings) of varying ages (ranging from 21 to 90 years) and ethnicities—although they were predominantly female and white. See previous publications for more information about the sample demographics (Booth and Masson 2021; Masson and Booth 2022, 2024).

2.4. Data Analysis

An inductive thematic analytical approach was used, wherein the themes and patterns were identified ‘bottom up’, rather than being pre-defined by theory (Braun and Clarke 2013). This was an appropriate method given the exploratory, qualitative nature of the study, which sought to contribute new insights into the lived experience of remand, which has previously received scant attention. First, the researchers ensured familiarisation with the data by reading and re-reading transcripts before individually coding all transcripts and discussing potential overarching themes. Together, the researchers reviewed the themes before naming and organising them to be understood further through the application of different criminological theories; for example, ‘techniques of neutralisation’ theory (Masson and Booth 2022) and ‘ambiguous loss’ theory (Masson and Booth 2024).

As explored in this article, another observable pattern in the data concerned the perspectives of women who occupied a maternal role and identity in relation to the person in prison on remand ($n = 16$). Their positionality and their experiences were distinct in a number of ways that led the researchers to consider this subsample further. As Table 1 indicates, the women ranged in age from 41 to 83, but the mean age was 61, and as with the larger population from the FOR study, most identified as White British. Analysis of these 16 interviews indicated that maternal figures, whose children or grandchildren were remanded, took on the emotional and financial pressures of supporting someone in prison, as well as juggling the needs of other family members left behind. The decision to

include the experience of all maternal figures, including grandmothers, within this article reflects the fact that mothering is a self-ascribed identity and very often does not end when a person turns 18 years old. A gendered analysis of maternal figures' experiences of remand, with a trauma-focused approach, was shared in a previous publication (Masson and Booth 2023). However, building on this, the article here utilises a different theoretical framework to unpack further the 'family practices' (Morgan 2011) of the maternal figures based on their emotions, experiences, and interactions with their loved ones in the community and their remanded (grand)child.

Table 1. Maternal Status and Demographics.

Pseudonym	Maternal Status	Age	Ethnicity
Rosie	Mother	Did not disclose	White British
Muriel	Grandmother	75	White British
Connie	Mother	73	White British
Heather	Step-Mother	63	White British
Camilla	Mother	63	White English
Sinead	Mother	56	White British
Bindu	Mother	58	British Asian
Zabina	Mother	50	White British
Jackie	Mother	49	White British
Tracey	Foster Mother	63	White British
Janet	Mother	61	White British
Scarlett	Mother	51	White British
Wynnie	Mother	58	White English
Marina	Mother	41	Mixed: French Arabic
Marie	Grandmother	83	White British
Stella	Grandmother	83	White British

The overarching theme was labelled 'The art of juggling: disrupted maternal practices and lack of control', and is presented first in the findings and discussion section. The results and discussion are then split into four interlinked subthemes, which stem from this overarching theme—these are: (1) *Poor prison conditions and access to healthcare*; (2) *Exposure to violence in prison*; (3) *Deterioration of mental health*; and (4) *Balancing or supporting the needs of other family members*. In discussing these results, the intention is to demonstrate the disrupted maternal practices, and the significant adverse impact that remand had on their lives, and to begin to reduce the ways in which this group remains forgotten.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Art of Juggling: Disrupted Maternal Practices and Lack of Control

Most of the maternal figures interviewed occupied a central matriarchal position within their family and therefore assumed considerable responsibility—emotional and practical. The intrinsic nature of remand creates uncertainty because the incarceration duration is unknown, and so the experience of remand will always include this additional punishment. It acts almost as an undercurrent in the narratives of the mothers shared in this article but is not a central theme explored, as the authors have already critically analysed this particular experience for loved ones in the FOR study through the theoretical application of 'ambiguous loss' (Masson and Booth 2024). Specific to the mothers and grandmothers was an attempt to regain control or juggle the emotions and concerns of different family members, including both the person on remand and other relatives in the community, because they viewed this as their responsibility by virtue of the maternal role.

In turn, this shaped the nature and scope of the impact remand had on them, their engagement in different 'family practices' (Morgan 2011), and their maternal identity.

Even though their loved ones may have been accused or convicted of criminal offences, and sometimes quite serious offences, those interviewed considered their support as essential to their child's health, wellbeing, recovery, and/or futures. These sentiments were epitomised by Scarlett: *"I always go, I always support him, I don't agree with what he's done but I'll always support him"*. As touched upon earlier, motherhood is a role, a commitment, and a responsibility that many women assume not only during their children's formative years but also through adolescence and into adulthood (Hays 1996; Masson and Booth 2023). For many interviewed, there was a sense of obligation that they should stay in contact with and support those remanded in custody because they were their mothers or grandmothers. By remaining engaged in maternal practices through the continued offering of support, it was also some way of maintaining control in what is otherwise a very turbulent situation. Their continued involvement, however small, restricted, or disrupted, was an attempt to enact maternal practices and therefore remain attached to their maternal identity. Interestingly, for a few of the maternal figures interviewed, there was a mixture of feelings relating to the remand incarceration, as although they could not control what was happening in prison, there was some comfort in at least knowing where their loved ones were, a sense of them being safer in prison than on the outside. For example:

"at the same time I know where he is, what he's doing, and I ain't getting shit!"
(Rosie-Mum).

"It was almost relief when she went to prison... would never have stopped doing what she doing on her own and erm, well as a parent I didn't know where she was, every time the phone rang didn't know if it was gonna be that she was dead ... it's like I've got my daughter back... I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown" (Zabina-Mum).

These findings align with other research conducted with caregivers (predominantly mothers or maternal figures) supporting young men in prison, which found that prison could result in more positive relationships (McCarthy and Adams 2019). However, with these maternal practices came the increased exposure to, and knowledge of, the prison conditions and experiences which their children had to endure on remand. As previously mentioned, remand prisons are often amongst some of the most chaotic, violent, and challenging prisons in England and Wales (HMIP 2025a, 2025b). The maternal figures reported increased worries about issues with their loved ones' wellbeing services in prison, which were frequently considered inappropriate and/or substandard, resulting in a deterioration of mental health. All of these combined to create frustrations regarding not being able to 'do' more and step in as mothers or grandmothers and take control. The four sub-themes shared below further explore how this manifested and impacted the mothers and grandmothers.

3.2. Poor Prison Conditions and Access to Healthcare

Echoing 'dire living conditions' and potential human rights violations within prison (House of Commons Justice Committee 2025), one participant, Bindu, spoke of the inhumane conditions in the prison where both her sons were remanded:

"(they) don't come out of their cell for 24 hours, for 24 hours, the cell had cockroaches, they had algae all around the cell...they were rationed food until the point where they were starving...one day, from the next room, erm, urine water came through the pipes and their whole room was stinking of urine and the wardens wouldn't open the door...the food is so bad there, erm, on last weekend there was 48 to 50 hour lockdown, no showers, no hot food, they were shoved

like cold, like frozen type tuna sandwiches through the thing, the cell, no walking around, no fresh air; how can that be human?"

Although they were adult children, Bindu's need to mother them and to ensure that they were living in hygienic conditions, with access to adequate food, showers, sanitary toilets, and fresh air, is not an excessive desire, especially when neither had yet been sentenced to prison. Bindu's sons were awaiting trial and therefore legally innocent, which created hope for Bindu that their imprisonment was a misunderstanding, a case of mistaken identity, and that they were being incorrectly and unfairly punished. It is unknown whether Bindu's views on the incarceration changed following the trial, but certainly at the time of the interview, she was adamant of their innocence, and without a conviction, this may be a more straightforward explanation for the remand, though having this mindset only exacerbated her anger and frustration of the conditions which they were subjected to; it was perceived as even more of an injustice. However, as seen in multiple prison inspections, issues with living conditions are not contained to just one prison (HMIP 2025a, 2025b). Another mum, Camilla, also described her concerns with the conditions that her son was kept in:

"oh course it was the hottest summer last year (Interviewer—yes it was, yeah) and he was in the cell without barely any air, it was like a sweatbox, the window didn't open properly and the doors were shut and it was horrendous and then of course it was winter and they were given one little thin blanket, like a cot blanket and he asked for more because the heating didn't work in their cell, 'no, you can't have another'".

Her concerns were not contained to just suitable temperatures and appropriate bedding within the cells:

"my son said you'd sit there and there were rats coming out of the drains and there was food he couldn't eat because it had been contaminated".

Those interviewed experienced significant pain in not being able to rectify these problems in their loved ones' lives and felt quite powerless to enact the changes required to address this. There are several domestic and international expectations for places of confinement and detention that clearly articulate the necessary human rights that individuals should have, despite their prisoner status. By way of example, the Mandela Rules state that all prisoners should be treated with respect due to their inherent dignity and value as human beings (UNODC 2015, Rule 1). Despite these expectations, the experience presented by the maternal figures in this research indicated that not only were these standards not met, but that they had little agency or control to mitigate or change their child's circumstances; they were unable to engage in 'family practices' (Morgan 2011) of their choosing because of the remand incarceration. Zabina spoke about her deep concerns relating to the poor healthcare her daughter had received, with no access to physiotherapy for an existing back injury and missed hospital appointments for her spine.

"Apparently she's entitled to same level of care as a person on the outside, like medical care, and I know for a fact that doesn't happen and it feels unjust to me, because the way I feel at the moment, currently, she's in prison but she's not a criminal at the moment because she hasn't been found guilty of anything but obviously she's treated as such".

Zabina was correct in believing her daughter should receive the same level of medical treatment that she would if she was not incarcerated. Rule 24 in the Mandela Rules (UNODC 2015) stipulates that 'prisoners should enjoy the same standards of health care that are available in the community'. Importantly, this is something that all prisoners in England and Wales are entitled to, not just those on remand. However, a recent article in

the BMJ concluded that ‘prison healthcare is continually in crisis’ (McLintock and Sheard 2024, p. 1), with suggestions that healthcare in prison is declining in standards rather than improving (Bowstead and Meek 2024). Zabina spoke about not being able to take control of her daughter’s access to healthcare made her feel helpless as a mother:

“helpless, yeah, helpless really, and you know when I’ve spoken to the healthcare people at the prison they’re very dismissive, very dismissive and I actually phoned them a few weeks back, I’m sure that they think that I’m a neurotic mother, but what it is, is that I’m a caring mother, I’m a mother, that’s it, I’m a mother”.

It was not just healthcare staff who prevented Zabina from taking back control of the situation and continuing her maternal role. For example, on one occasion when she had not heard from her daughter for a few days, she called the prison, but was told that they could not tell her anything due to GDPR, despite her being the next of kin on file. Therefore, despite being legally innocent, there were significant blocks in communication between mother and daughter, something which could have been prevented if bail had been granted instead. Documenting the contact details of prisoners’ significant others was a recommendation proposed by Farmer (2017) to better facilitate supportive family ties in prison. Also recommended was a ‘gateway communications system’, so that ‘families’ concerns about mental and physical health should be properly recorded and action taken (Farmer 2017, p. 12), which would have been crucial in instances such as that described by Zabina. Instead, her concerns were only taken seriously when she escalated them through the official prison complaints process.

“You almost have to threaten the prison every single time and I don’t know if they’re just used to people going ‘oh ok if that’s the way it is’ and just giving up”.

Linked to access to prison healthcare is the maintenance of medication. Stella, Marie, and Ray (Grandfather) regularly travelled together to and from a remand prison to provide emotional and financial support to their grandson, who had been on medication prior to being remanded. The immediacy of remand imprisonment, from arrest to court to prison, removes opportunities to organise affairs and communicate with relevant professionals, so that crucial documentation and information can be transferred/carried into prison by remanded individuals. This includes evidence, such as a prescription, from a medical practitioner (e.g., GP), which outlines existing and necessary medication. Understandably, Stella, Marie, and Ray were concerned about the delays their grandson experienced in obtaining his medication following remand:

“he was arrested on the Tuesday and sent to [names remand prison] on the Wednesday and we went to see him on the Sunday ... he hadn’t had any medication at all from Wednesday to the Sunday” (Stella).

The fact that a new prescription had not been administered by the prison healthcare team as a result of her grandson’s initial healthcare screening (if it took place) caused significant frustration to Stella, who attempted to address the problem by making a complaint to the prison officers at the prison visits desk. Stella’s actions, alongside those taken by Zabina above, show how maternal figures were advocating for their loved ones in prison as a means of regaining *some* control and ‘doing’ family practices in the context of remand custody. However, many interviewees’ concerns regarding their loved ones’ well-being were not only related to existing medical issues but also to their physical safety whilst incarcerated.

3.3. Exposure to Violence in Prison

Local/remand prisons in England and Wales hold those on remand (pre-conviction and pre-sentence) alongside sentenced prisoners who have been convicted of a wide variety of offences and present varying risk levels and propensity towards violence. These practices contradict the Mandela Rules (UNODC 2015, Rule 11(b) and 112), which propose the separation of 'untried prisoners' from convicted prisoners. The research here indicates how failure to separate these groups of prisoners can be overwhelming and intimidating for loved ones supporting those on remand, and especially first-time prisoners. The maternal figures interviewed in the current study expressed deep concerns for their loved ones' safety alongside exasperation that they did not have control to reduce or prevent any further endangerment of their remanded children. Sinead spoke of her fear regarding the danger her younger son was in due to other people on the prison wings, as well as the risk that he might be radicalised by persuasive individuals. Neither of these is unfounded worries given violence in prisons being at alarming levels (HMIP 2025a, 2025b), and given that international 'research has shown that prisons can be a breeding ground for radicalisation' (Powis et al. 2019, p. 3).

"It's not a good place for people to be in prison because you will get converted, radicalised, you will get injured, it's a dangerous place, especially for someone who's never been in prison before and that could be someone who is not mentally ill or who is mentally ill, it's the same thing for a first timer. It's a very, very dangerous place...you've got violent people in there, not just robbers, not just drivers, you've got aggressive, violent people in there, it's not a good place to be."

Similar findings were produced in Sykes' (1958) seminal work on the 'pains' of imprisonment, which highlighted the 'deprivation of security' wherein poor conditions and mixed populations can threaten feelings of safety and lead to negative behaviours and more aggressive, violent prison environments. For example, Jackie spoke of her fear for her remanded son due to the violence directed at him by those on his wing:

"there was another time when my son got rushed in his cell, they stabbed all his feet, his back and his legs with sharpened toothbrushes, nicked everything he'd got and he hadn't got a lot...so there was all that and hearing about that [Jackie gets upset]...I just think it's horrendous"

For Jackie, hearing what her son was experiencing, and his fear, was incredibly painful and worrying. She described the phone contact when he first arrived in prison:

"The day they put him in there...a guard had taken him to an office and he was screaming down the phone 'you need to get me out, you need to get me out' absolutely hysterical, he was saying 'they're trying to hurt us, they're trying to set fire to us' and this, that, and the other".

Understandably, this type of contact was very upsetting for Jackie, who had no way of verifying whether he was actually at risk in prison when he initially arrived or whether this perception was a result of mental health deterioration. However, evidence (Zhong et al. 2021; JUSTICE 2023) reports that prisoners are most at risk of self-harm and suicide within the first few weeks of incarceration. These risks could be increased through remand practices because of the speed at which individuals are detained into prison custody following arrest and court, and the uncertainty related to the length of the incarceration. Also, although many prisons have facilities such as 'first night wings' or 'induction wings' in England and Wales, these do not ensure a more permanent separation of 'untried prisoners' from those with a conviction, as stipulated in the Mandela Rules (UNODC 2015, Rule 11 and 112). It may be that the implementation of the Mandela Rules could help alleviate some of the concerns of loved ones following remand, and especially remedy

some of the maternal fears recorded in this research pertaining to their children's lack of safety. It may also help mother and child relationships in the short and long term, as 'exposure to violence' as an additional concern during this initial remand period could be reduced. For example, perhaps as a response to his initial experience on the prison wing, Jackie's son, at later points whilst on remand, tried to mitigate the impact on her for both her mental health as well as his safety:

"he tried to hide a lot of things...because he didn't want us to be worried and upset, he said to me he does this because, well they don't want you to be upset, don't want to cry [during the visit] and make him look weak...so you've got to be careful".

She was then left worrying that he was being exposed to further violence, but not telling her to both protect her and not appear 'weak' during prison visits. As a mother, Jackie wanted to 'do' what she felt was best for her son, but by following his lead, this included suppressing her own emotions and instincts to want to control and manage her son's pain during face-to-face contact provided at visits. As such, his exposure to violence significantly influenced the nature of their relationship and their mother-son dynamics, as Jackie felt powerless to fully enact her protective maternal role. It was also part of her experience that she spoke about in considerable length during the interview, and which caused her to become upset, demonstrating the enormous weight she was carrying in this regard. In a different way, Bindu articulated how exposure to violence caused her high levels of stress:

"you have phone calls where you have Dadvar screaming and crying like 'mum they're gonna kill us, they're gonna kill us, do something' and I'm like choking with panic and I'm thinking 'what the hell?' and 'how have I got into this situation and how have my boys got into this situation' you know?...it's heart-breaking for me because I feel, mentally 'will he ever be right?', it's like if they come out".

Due to how scared she was, Bindu spoke of **if** they come out of prison rather than **when** they come out, which would be a mother's worst nightmare. This had a significant impact on Bindu's ability to carry on each day and to remain positive about their future. Again, this epitomises the uncertainty that runs as an undercurrent during remand, as there is no end date or known minimum tariff applied to the imprisonment. Remand also removes coping mechanisms which might ordinarily be used to manage incarceration, such as countdowns, work, and/or employment, which may, to some degree, improve prison experiences and reduce the worry that the mothers and grandmothers had for their circumstances. Connie explained how progression to another prison in the local area that held sentenced prisoners would likely be better for her grandson as: "*we have read about it and it seems that there's so many activities that they can do*". Instead, while on remand, the stress of worrying about the well-being of her children was taking a significant toll, and for Bindu, this resulted in her isolating herself from her grandchildren:

"I couldn't perform with my work, I stopped going out, I stopped going to town, I stopped buying groceries, I stopped cooking, I stopped having the grandchildren over here because all I was doing was crying all the time, I was such a mental and physical mess".

Recognising and experiencing this indirect prison violence was an experience that many of the maternal figures felt intensely, which permeated their thoughts and shaped their daily activities and practices. The emotional labour associated with knowing their loved ones could be unsafe resulted in feelings of uncontrollable helplessness. Likewise, the maternal figures' concerns were intensified because they did not know how long their loved ones might be exposed to this violence in the absence of a confirmed sentence tariff or the progression, when sentenced, to a more stable and calmer prison with potentially

better facilities and opportunities. Linked to this, for many interviewed, part of the harm of remand to themselves came from their constant worries about the mental health of those in prison.

3.4. Deterioration of Mental Health

A key concern relating to remand is the increased risk of self-harm and suicide (Zhong et al. 2021) despite evidence indicating reduced access to mental health care for this group (House of Commons Justice Committee 2023). Similarly, several maternal figures had witnessed how the mental health of their remanded children had deteriorated since being remanded, and how this then negatively impacted their own mental health as they became increasingly concerned for their children's well-being. The deterioration in mental health discussed in this subtheme, therefore, pertains to both the person remanded and the maternal figures as the two are intertwined. For example, Stella and Marie spoke of concerns relating to the impact of remand on their grandson's mental health.

“Marie: sometimes he does really get fed up here, doesn't he? Because it was dangerous...

Stella: see when he was in [names remand prison] he was self-harming as well...

Marie: because the last time we came down he said he's burnt it (his arm)

Stella: he said did it at work on a boiler but what he was doing

Marie: well he said he did...

Stella: I think he was burning himself, yeah it were right up here [miming the burns on her own arm].”

What this exchange indicates is the extreme coping mechanism their grandson had adopted in response to being remanded, but also the perceptive nature of these women to *see through* his explanation for the burns, and instead know something further was amiss. Marie saying 'he said he did...' implies suspicion and an awareness of her grandsons' mental state, which speaks to their closeness, and to the benefit of loved ones being present for those in prison, as they might better *know* the person and notice signs of deterioration/harm quicker and more intuitively than prison professionals/staff. Already, there are recommendations for families to be included in certain aspects of prison practices, for example, around release planning (Action for Prisoners' Families et al. 2007), but our findings further suggest the importance of including and listening to loved ones earlier following incarceration, and importantly, during remand. Doing so would logically improve experiences for both the person in prison on remand and their supportive loved ones. The previously mentioned delay of medication and clear signs of self-harm made Marie and Stella very worried about both his physical and mental health, but left them feeling quite powerless to do anything about it, other than trusting the informal (calling the prison) or formal (writing to the governor) prison complaints process. This again speaks to the need for the consistent and effective implementation of Farmer's (2017) recommendation for families to be the 'golden thread' and for a 'gateway communication system'. Many loved ones supporting those on remand may not be aware of their legal rights, as well as the processes to make complaints, and therefore may accept having their experiences or concerns brushed aside by either overstretched (House of Commons Justice Committee 2025) or seemingly uncaring prison staff.

Tracey's foster son had pre-existing issues with poor mental health, but due to the previously mentioned dangerous nature of prison, she was often unclear whether the risks he mentioned to her were real or fiction, or the extent of the potential security risks facing him:

“you're never sure if it's them being paranoid or if there is something going on that you should be aware of”.

Tracey's inability to speak directly to officers on the wing, or to visit the inside of the prison itself, meant that she was left worrying that either her son's mental health was deteriorating on remand, or that he was physically at risk and that she had not taken his concerns seriously enough—neither of which were preferential, but both of which could take a significant toll on her own wellbeing. The lack of clarity in instances like this, and that shared by Jackie earlier, was carried as an enormous weight by the maternal figures as they grappled with their precarious position and their inability to perform caring and/or protective family practices to support their children. Yet, these harms are predominantly overlooked in current legislation and policy procedures that articulate and guide the purpose, function, and practices of remand, but will hopefully begin to be addressed in the upcoming Sentencing Bill.

Likewise, Sinead was incredibly worried about the negative impact on her son's physical and mental health, as he was refusing medication and food, and also hearing voices. The stress was also negatively impacting her own physical well-being, and she spoke about her own significant weight loss and her hair falling out in clumps as a result of the stress.

"His bones are fragile, his muscles are gone. He could die... He's not being looked after at all, with his illness, and he's deteriorating...he's called me crying so I've gone into Dr Spock mode when I say it, there is a possibility he could die. For the sake of what? Being on remand for that amount of time. At least if you're remanded for 6 months, at least there should be a stop point."

Although there are legal limits in which prisoners can be remanded in prison for (Crown Prosecution Service 2023), as argued previously, it is well documented that individuals and those attempting to support them in the community can spend quite lengthy periods of time in this damaging 'in limbo' period, often with a not guilty outcome at the end (Masson and Booth 2024). However, the knock-on effect on such women supporting their loved ones during these often extended remand periods is not considered by the judiciary, in legislation, and not mentioned in penal policy documents despite a willingness to accept Farmer's (2017, 2019) review recommendations to centralise prison operations around family relationships as a the 'golden thread'. However, in instances where an individual presents significant mental ill-health, as was the case for Sinead's son, serious questions are raised about the appropriateness of remand and, akin to the previously discussed sentiments in the Joint Letter to the Rt Hon David Lammy MP (2025), prison should not be used as a substitute for healthcare. While the proposed changes to the 1976 Bail Act via the Sentencing Bill may see a reduction in the remand population through the 'no real prospect' test, there is no mention of people with mental ill health, raising questions about how it might translate into judicial practice for this population. Mothers aware of their child's mental state will remain powerless to criminal justice decisions and practices, and as Scarlett explains, this lack of control and the feeling of an inability to take charge and make positive changes induces 'fear'.

"A couple of weeks ago he was suicidal...And there's very little you can do on the outside when they're on the inside but when they're on the outside you've got a little bit more control of, do you know, getting him that help and getting that support...I always worry about the boys!...it's a bit like the fear of what he might do if it all gets too much for him".

Had bail been given, Scarlett could have been able to put more protective measures around her son whilst he was in the community, which would hopefully provide further support if he was later sentenced to custody. For many, seeing their children in prison struggling so much was incredibly painful, as one Stepmum, Heather, said "*when he was upset we were upset...he was locked up away from it, we weren't.*" Likewise, Janet explained

how emotional the sudden remand experience had been for her, and how, despite almost daily telephone calls from her son, once communication had been established, the situation meant: *"I can't stop crying, every day"*. Therefore, the remanding of their loved one created unexpected harms as a result of concerns for the well-being of those in prison, harms which remain predominantly missing from academic and judicial debates or conversations about the purpose and use of remand custody. Also forgotten in these discussions are the ways in which maternal figures juggle support for the person in prison alongside their other caretaking roles and responsibilities with other loved ones in the community.

3.5. Balancing or Supporting the Needs of Other Family Members

As well as supporting their children in prison on remand, several maternal figures also spoke about juggling the needs of others. They often had a responsibility, and/or developed significant concern, for other family members in the community who displayed adverse physical and mental health as a consequence of the remand. For several, it was the impact on their other adult children (the siblings of those incarcerated), while for others, it was the children of those incarcerated (the interviewees' grandchildren). Marina explained how she had to balance the needs of all her children, not just her daughter in prison on remand: *"because it is not just about my daughter ... my daughter has suffered, all my kids, they are all suffer[ing]"*. Similarly, Sinead spoke about the impact on her eldest son, who, despite never having mental health issues or any medication for depression, required anti-depressants when his younger brother, Nathan, was remanded:

"he's been in and out of prison for over 20 years and he's one of the lads and he's as hard as nails, does the gym, got hundreds of friends...he's a 37 year old massive boy with a bald head who don't care about nothing but would cry if you said the word 'Nathan'."

Having been to prison himself, Sinead's eldest son had lived experience of the remand prison that Nathan was being held in, and therefore had lived knowledge of the conditions and regime, and the kind of vulnerability that might make Nathan a target for maltreatment by other prisoners. This vulnerability pertained to both his mental health diagnosis and the serious, violent offence which he was accused of, and the potential for this to contribute to a likely long sentence if convicted. Her eldest son displaying this level of concern and poor mental health to Sinead only served to increase her own worries about Nathan on remand and further negatively impact her as a mother powerless to protect him.

In a different way, both Jackie and Scarlett spoke about the impact on their daughters of having their brothers incarcerated, with Jackie saying how:

"they find it really difficult...the middle child, she comes and sees him once or twice a month, she works long hours because she's a carer. The little one doesn't come that much, she suffers from anxiety so she'll come once every month, or every few months, erm to see him but she'll have massive anxiety like...I mean it's hard for them, at first every time I used to take them out they used to be sobbing and things like that".

The impact on her daughters' visiting and supporting their brother weighed heavily on Jackie, and her decision to maintain contact and visits and to encourage her other children to do the same was not an easy one. Understandably, her son in prison wanted to see his sisters during visitation, but this essentially meant that Jackie was tasked with the responsibility of balancing the 'best interests' of one child against another; a precarious and unenviable position to be in as a mother and for an unknown period of time. The situation was similar for Marina, who tried to encourage her teenage son to visit his sister with her each weekend, admitting *"I push him to come"* when, instead, sometimes he wanted to play football with his friends. Remanded prisoners can receive more visits than

those convicted (GOV.UK 2025), because of the differential legal status remand prisoners occupy when pre-trial (and legally innocent). This provides more opportunities for different loved ones to have frequent contact with the person on remand; however, this can increase pressure on loved ones, for example, needing to arrange greater amounts of time off work, re-arranging childcare responsibilities, and incurring more travel costs. As Muriel said, *“we couldn’t afford to come and visit him every week”*, while Wynnie said that visiting too frequently could be *“counterproductive...we run out of things to talk about”*. Additionally, the increased provision to visit during remand creates more pressure in instances such as that described by Jackie above, making the impact on maternal figures tasked with this juggling act heightened and distinct from those experienced by loved ones supporting a sentenced prisoner with fewer visits.

Previous research has also highlighted the ‘courtesy’ stigma, ‘kin contamination’, or ‘secondary prisonization’ (Comfort 2003; Condry 2007; Booth 2020; Cooper et al. 2025) that is afforded to loved ones supporting those in prison. This occurs through the loved ones’ association and relationship to a prisoner as someone who occupies a lower social status by virtue of their unlawful actions (whether accused or convicted). Judgement and discrimination can follow for loved ones even though they themselves are not accused of committing a crime. This particular issue was managed by Scarlett, whose adult daughter had decided not to maintain contact with her two remanded brothers due to others judging her based on her brother’s actions:

“it’s like someone will say to my daughter, like the other day in there they say ‘are you related to?’...she goes ‘erm, that’s none of your business’ and when she’s at work she says ‘I don’t even see them, I have nothing to do with them.’ Do you know what I mean? ‘I don’t have contact with them or anything so I don’t want to talk about them’”.

Her daughter disapproved of her mother’s maintenance of contact with her brothers and felt the prison visits should be stopped because of the ongoing harm and stigma to other family members, including Scarlett. This stance occupied by her daughter left Scarlett in a very difficult position, balancing the needs and wishes of all her children. She spoke of attempting to support her sons in prison and visiting at least twice a week, and maintaining her relationship with her daughter on the outside, who had not been accused of an offence. Scarlett’s daughter’s views on her brothers’ remands may be reflective of their repeated engagement in lawbreaking activities, and the fact that their current remand was not their first time in prison. This was different from other families, wherein the remand was the first time prison was experienced by the family. For example, much of Bindu’s interview drew attention to the shock and bewilderment of the criminal justice system, given that they had not previously experienced prison as a family. Arguably, this inexperience created more obstacles as she had to ‘learn’ prison policies and practices, which have been characterised in previous research as a ‘socialisation’ process (Condry 2007), as well as an attempt to instil some control over the situation for everyone impacted. This may also explain why her role as a mother to two sons on remand, and as a grandmother to several school-aged children, focused on the harms associated with the father–child separation. She spoke of significant changes in the children’s behaviour and them being different children, for example, her grandson going from a chatty little boy to being miserable and silent. Bindu spoke about how her eldest granddaughter struggled:

“she’s so traumatised and she’s never bed wet and she’s started bed-wetting...every time she goes to the prison (for visits), the trauma starts, the environment is as such, that she’s 7, she’s starting to read so she knows that Dads in, not a nice place...she’s just so traumatised, she’s just like, gone off everything, erm, at one point I thought she was becoming anorexic because she stopped

eating...she usually comes for sleepovers at the weekends and recently, the last weekend she went to see her dad she didn't want to come sleepover because she said 'if I come sleepover with granny, somebody's going to take my mummy away' because her dad's been taken away and so mummy will get taken away and so she clings to her mother like crazy."

Research with prisoners' children similarly documents changes in behaviours following separation from their parents (for example, Jones and Wainaina-Woźna 2019; Cooper et al. 2025), but with remand (unlike when sentenced to prison), the ability to explain the circumstances, for example, with regard to their parents' whereabouts and the unknown duration of the separation, is a further challenge. Arguably, the ambiguity (Masson and Booth 2024) that constitutes this form of punishment when remanding individuals is felt throughout whole families, and the findings here only start to shed light on some of the ways this could shape children's experiences of parental incarceration; further research is needed. What Bindu's experience suggests is that being a supportive (grand)mother in such instances can induce feelings of worry in multiple loved ones, both in prison and in the community, and potentially change the nature and scope of relationships with different family members. In the example above, Bindu was losing contact with her grandchildren because of the fear and distress they were exhibiting since their father's remand, which shaped the 'family practices' (Morgan 2011) she could perform as a grandmother. This was another set of maternal practices that were disrupted as a result of the remand, over which she felt she had no control. This could, in turn, have significant implications for her grandmaternal identity and short and long-term well-being.

4. Conclusions

This exploratory 'Families on Remand' (FOR) study is the first to examine the experiences of loved ones supporting a person in prison custody on remand in England and Wales. In-depth interviews were conducted with 61 loved ones, with the specific experiences of 16 women who self-identified as mothers (biological, step, or foster) or grandmothers explored in this article. Identified during the inductive thematic analysis, the positionality and narratives of this subsample of women had particular patterns reflecting their unique personality and narratives, and through the application of Morgan's (2011) 'family practices', interesting insights into their 'juggling act' composed of 'disrupted maternal practices and a lack of control' were identified as an overarching theme. The mothers and grandmothers occupied a prominent position (akin to a matriarch) in their family and, in alignment with sociological research on motherhood (Blair-Loy 2003), prioritised the needs and circumstances of their family members, despite this placing considerable strain on themselves. Motherhood is well known for having immeasurable social expectations as well as internal pressures (for example, see Hays 1996), and in the context of remand, this research found that these persuasions can result in women battling to continue performing their maternal role.

The first subthemes shed light on the impact that poor conditions, violence, and deteriorating mental health in remand prisons could have on maternal figures as they witnessed their loved ones navigate the challenges of contemporary prison life. These findings illustrate how the inadequate treatment of 'untried prisoners' is in breach of international human rights expectations for places of detention, specifically the Mandela Rules, through the unsanitary and poor living conditions, and their integration with sentenced populations (UNODC 2015). There are also inconsistencies with government-accepted national review recommendations, such as those proposed by Lord Farmer's (2017, 2019) reviews, which have also not effectively been implemented across the prison estate; those interviewed did not reveal experiences that indicated that they were treated as the 'golden thread'. By contrast, these maternal figures reported feelings of powerlessness and

isolation, wherein their concerns about violence and mental health deterioration felt unheard. This was frustrating, painful, and distressing because, as maternal figures, there was a sense that it was their duty to protect and care for their children, regardless of their incarcerated positionality. These findings also raise important questions about the role that loved ones, and especially maternal figures, *could* have in informing the prison about concerns for safety, ill-health, and harmful coping mechanisms for those remanded. Their knowledge and perception of the remanded persons' behaviour, attitudes, and experiences prompt insights that could be beneficial to prison operations and regimes. While families have been identified as a useful support during release planning (Action for Prisoners' Families et al. 2007), when they are able and willing, there is potential for their role to also inform and improve remand conditions.

Another area of policy that appears to be lacking is in instances of remand being used for people presenting with severe mental ill-health. The maternal figures carried the enormous weight of worry, which may remain unchanged through the proposed Sentencing Bill, which does not include a specific mention of how mental health vulnerabilities will feed into the 'no real prospect' test when remand is considered. Indeed, there remains no genuine consideration on how 'top down' policies and practices impact loved ones supporting those on remand, and especially mothers dedicated to their maternal role, even in circumstances when this had to be balanced with the needs and stigma that the incarceration inflicted on other relatives, such as adult siblings and grandchildren.

There are, however, some limitations of this research which should be noted. First, this study is only representing the experiences of those visiting loved ones in English prisons; it did not capture the experiences of those not providing support through visits or loved ones not maintaining contact. This may include mothers and grandmothers who have disengaged (temporarily or permanently) from their maternal identity and/or role, as we agree is their right to do (Codd 2008). Second, the sample demographics represent mostly white women engaged in prison visits. The researchers did attempt to address both the gendered and ethnic imbalances; however, this may be a reflection of gendered expectations of support and the demographics of those in prison in the particular prisons. Likewise, many interviewees spoke of experiences in different remand prisons from the ones where data collection took place. Finally, single snapshot experiences were captured, and how these experiences changed over time were not expressed with the chosen methodology in this FOR study.

Nonetheless, there are several salient points from this article that underscore the ways in which the experience of supporting an individual in prison on remand is distinct and requires greater attention. First, there remain significant unknowns about the short and longer-term experience of remand, how relationships evolve through the prison sentence, and how loved ones conceptualise and maintain supportive ties. Given the links made in the literature between family contact and reducing reoffending (e.g., Farmer 2017, 2019), it may be prudent to explore this further as a means of tackling the penal 'crisis', including overcrowding and high recidivism. Second, there needs to be an expansion of policies and practices that recognise the particularities of remand custody for those in prison, and for loved ones, to ensure that specific provisions and support can be focused on this large, and recently increasing, population. Despite the failure to consider remand in the ISR (2025), the current Labour Government can still direct positive remand-specific changes as seen in their Sentencing Bill, and continue to work with Lord Farmer's team to monitor the implementation of the 2017 and 2019 review recommendations. For example, responding more precisely to the mental health needs of remand populations through effective 'communication systems' could result in significant and much-needed reductions in self-harm and suicide rates, and improved outcomes for their concerned loved ones in the community. Finally, it is not just that research and policy attention are lacking,

but more generally, there is a need for an increased awareness and recognition of remand populations and their loved ones within the justice sector, and with individuals working in and around prisons. The FOR research findings indicate explicitly how remand is distinct, and yet several times, we, the authors, have been met with responses and comments from practitioners, policymakers, and academics that signify how remand had not been an experience or issue on their radar. By virtue of this, maternal figures working tirelessly to care for and support an individual on remand, such as those whose practices and experiences have been shared in this article, also remain hidden and therefore poorly supported. Without further attention given to this population, they run the significant risk of remaining still forgotten.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, data curation, N.B. and I.M.; writing—original draft preparation, writing—review and editing; funding acquisition, N.B. and I.M. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded by the Oakdale Trust (June 2018).

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the British Society of Criminology (2006) Code of Ethics and was approved by both researchers' university Faculty Research Ethics Committees; De Montfort University (Protocol code 3169 and date of approval 20-08-2018) and University of Leicester (Protocol code 18206-imm17-ss:criminology, department of. and date of approval 22-10-2018).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The datasets presented in this article are not readily available because data from this study is not available publicly; consent from participants did not permit this open access sharing, and there are additional ethical considerations for study participants, given their relation to people in prison. Requests concerning datasets should be directed to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments: Special thanks go to Roberta, Dan, and all the loved ones who kindly gave their time to share their lived experiences with us, so that we could amplify the harms of remand.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

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