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Becoming a “better” father: supporting the needs of incarcerated fathers

ABSTRACT

Given the importance of fathering to the well-being and development of children, paternal incarceration has a major impact for families and children. It also deeply affects men's future role as fathers. Drawing on interviews with 65 incarcerated fathers in New South Wales Australia, this paper explores their experiences. The separation and disconnection from family that many men experienced as children is frequently repeated in adulthood, as they often have limited contact with their own families even when not in custody. Despite the barriers to connection, the men express strong aspirations to be good fathers and to achieve a 'better life' for their children. The absence of stable models of responsive fathering in their early lives is a common theme that has implications for the development of education and support programs for fathers in custody.

Keywords: family support, father absence, fatherhood, incarceration, parent-child relationships

INTRODUCTION

There is increasing awareness of the positive contribution of fathering to the wellbeing and development of children (Wilson & Prior, 2011; Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, & Bremberg, 2008). Fathers play an important role in their children's development and socialisation (Torres, 2014; Sarkadi et al., 2008). Children with an incarcerated father have been identified as disadvantaged in several areas of psychosocial development. They are more likely to have significantly increased levels of aggressive behaviour and there is some evidence of attention problems (Geller, Cooper, Garfinkel, Schwartz-Soicher, & Mincy, 2012).

Fathering from prison can be a difficult experience for many men as not only are they separated physically from their children, but being excluded from their children's lives can cause profound feelings of guilt and sadness (Greif, 2014). Further, their children often experience disconnection and confusion as a result of their father's incarceration as well as stigma related to community attitudes towards prisoners and their families (Lee, Sansone, Swanson, & Tatum, 2012). For some children the separation from their father may exacerbate an already unstable and dysfunctional home situation and a range of adverse circumstances including poverty, poor education, insecure attachment, trauma and problems with mental or physical health (Murray, Farrington, & Sekol, 2012; Carlson, & Shafer, 2010). On release from prison, many fathers have problems reuniting with their children, especially if the children's mother has moved or is estranged. The possibility of violent behaviour towards children and their mothers remains a major concern when fathers and partners return home from prison (D'Andrade, & Valdez, 2012).

A significant knowledge gap exists about how to support incarcerated parents to ensure that they can be the best parents possible despite their circumstances. There is limited understanding of the factors that facilitate change in parenting approaches for incarcerated fathers. This paper reports the findings of interviews with incarcerated fathers as part of a larger study, 'Breaking the Cycle' (BTC), that aimed to explore the learning and support needs of parents in prison to enable a shift towards pro-social parenting practices. The interviews focused on understanding men's experiences of being fathered, fathering their own children, and their parenting support needs both in custody and after release.

BACKGROUND

In 2015 there were 33,256 men and 2876 women incarcerated within the Australian prison system (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). The BTC study was located in New South Wales (NSW), with an average of 11,797 prisoners, the largest inmate population in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Prisoners with dependent children are 46% of the correctional population (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2015). The rate of fatherhood is higher amongst incarcerated Indigenous men in NSW (51.9%) than non-Indigenous men (37.6%) (Governance & Continuous Improvement Division, 2014). This is consistent with other countries where minority populations are more likely to be incarcerated (Glaze, & Maruschak, 2010).

It is now well accepted that a lack of sensitive and responsive parenting experiences for children can result in perpetuation of a cycle of disadvantage, criminality, violence, substance abuse and mental illness (Allen, 2015; Ball, 2009; Thornberry, Freeman-Gallant, & Lovegrove, 2009). Children with incarcerated fathers are more likely to be incarcerated as adults than children whose fathers have not (Beaver, 2013). Fathering behaviour is

significantly informed by the way a man has been fathered as a child (Guizzo, 2011). Yet many incarcerated fathers have not experienced sensitive or responsive parenting, and thus have limited opportunities to learn how to respond appropriately to and interact with their children.

Children with incarcerated parents are a uniquely vulnerable population (Sheehan, 2010). These children frequently have difficulty maintaining family connections, experience negligible material support and disruptions in their care that can include frequent changes in care givers and places of residence (Sheehan, 2010; The Pew Charitable Trust, 2010). They are also less likely to be expelled or suspended from school (The Pew Charitable Trust, 2010). For some children the presence of a father in their life can be disruptive, for instance if he is violent or places undue demands on their mother or on family finances. Some children may be separated from their fathers for short periods of time while others may not see their fathers for many years. Children may not have the opportunity to adequately prepare themselves for this separation or in turn for reunification (La Vigne, Davis, & Brazzell, 2008). The transient nature of the father's presence within the family, especially if he is incarcerated numerous times during their childhood, frequently results in family instability. Instability is thought to have a greater impact on the child's wellbeing than the type of family structure he or she experiences (Waldfogel, Craigie, & Brooks-Gunn, 2010).

Despite being aware of such challenges, Lee and colleagues (2012) found that incarcerated fathers perceived their relationship with their children as being strongly connected and positive. The involvement of incarcerated fathers in their children's lives has been identified as providing benefits for not only children but for society (Maldonado, 2006). However,

incarcerated fathers require support to enhance their relationship and interaction with their children and to minimise the negative impact of separation as a result of incarceration.

METHOD

This paper is based on semi-structured interviews with 64 incarcerated fathers. The study was guided by an appreciative inquiry (AI) approach. AI primarily focuses on the strengths of participants and their situation. It is a method for managing change by building a constructive union between participants and researchers to talk about capacities past and present (Cooperrider, & Whitney, 2005). It enables data collection to investigate processes and outcomes providing a model for replication in other situations or contexts (Preskill, & Catsanbas, 2006). It requires the need to: discover and appreciate what is already present; dream of what might be; talk about what should be the ideal; and strengthen affirmative action to build hope and sustain actions and deliver recommendations for change (Cooperrider, & Whitney, 2005; Shuayb, Sharp, Judkins, & Hetherington, 2009). During the interviews we focused on the men's experiences of being parents rather than their experience as prisoners. We asked about: their childhood experiences of being parented; their experience as fathers; contact and relationships with their children; their plans for reunification with their children on release; experience of parenting programs while incarcerated and their strengths as parents.

The study received ethics approval from the [University] and [partner]. We made significant efforts to ensure men in this high-risk population were well informed verbally about the research purpose and any potential risks before providing their written consent to participate. Non-custodial officers offered men known to be fathers the opportunity to participate in the study. When the men arrived to be interviewed the researchers reviewed the purpose of the

research, strategies to ensure confidentiality, reassured the men they were not compelled to answer any of the questions and confirmed the men were still willing to be interviewed.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data came from a semi-structured interview and questionnaires with both closed and open responses and which were administered verbally or in writing according to the participants' literacy. This paper focuses on responses to questions on: demographic details; strengths as a parent; strategies to manage separation from their children; support they received that assisted them as parents; experience of parenting programs; and plans for being with their children on release. A majority of interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. In 20 cases where we did not have permission to audio record, the interviewer took detailed notes on the questionnaire form, including short quotes where possible. All data were de-identified and any distinguishing features removed.

We used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach to identify themes within the data. This analysis required reading and re-reading the transcripts to enable the richness of the data to be recognised and foregrounded (Braun, & Clarke, 2006). Themes were identified and condensed into five main areas: men's experiences of being fathered; men's experiences of fathering; feelings of separation and missing out; aspirations to be a better dad; and wanting a better life for their children.

FINDINGS

Characteristics of Participants

The 64 participants were interviewed in seven NSW correctional centres in rural and metropolitan locations. The inclusion criteria were inmates with children up to age 18 and no

history of child-related offences. Their characteristics are included in Table 1 which presents not only demographic data but a snapshot of the nature of the contact between these men and their children. The table summarises the wide diversity of circumstances and arrangements in these families and highlights the proportions who have little or no current connection with their children. For instance, in this sample, over one third of the fathers received no visits from their children and a similar proportion has limited or no phone contact. Over one third did not live with their children prior to incarceration.

TABLE 1 HERE

The findings of the analysis are reported according to the five main themes identified above.

Men's Experiences of Being Fathered

Many of the fathers interviewed had complex family histories and inter-personal relationships. Stories of separation from family, placement in out-of-home care and significant loss of a parent were strong themes throughout the interviews.

For many men, female family members were their main caregivers during the major part of their childhood. This resulted in a lack of male and fathering role models:

... lived with Nan all my life (36).

My own parents were in prison.... I was fostered out from the age of four to ten. Four of these years I was with strangers and two with my aunty. I was returned to my mother at 10 (49)

Some men experienced the death of their father during childhood:

I grew up with only my mother. My father died. I never knew him (4)

My father died when he was a young man and I was only a kid. There wasn't much of a positive role that he played there. No male role model, I suppose. He didn't really give me advice that I needed to look after my kids (1).

Many of the fathers left the family home young (see Table 1). Being cared for by his mother and stepfather as a young child had, for this man, resulted in a difficult relationship. He describes becoming independent from a young age:

I learnt early to look after myself – the streets more or less brought me up (43).

Several men experienced being removed from their families by community welfare services and being placed into out-of-home care. During their childhood several fathers were placed with a range of agencies and foster carers, resulting in a lack of stability in their experience of families or relationships.

I was removed as a baby [from my family] and spent some time in a home (60)

DOCS [community services] got me when my mother died suddenly. I was knee-high. I don't remember much of my mother. I was fostered – two foster parents, and also in an Aboriginal Christian mission until I was about 18. (65)

This man goes on to talk about the contact he later had with his father. Significantly he links this contact with alcohol:

My dad was around a bit. I used to skip out of school and go and see him when he was having a drink. (65)

Other men had very limited experience of family life as they were placed in custodial care early in their lives. The following quotes document a trajectory of offending behaviour:

I spent a lot of time in boys' homes and Juvie [juvenile justice facilities], prisons – didn't spend a lot of time at home (37).

I have spent much of my adult life in gaol from the age of 18. I also had several periods in boys' homes as a child (62).

Men's Experiences of Fathering

It was common for the men to relate complex stories of multiple partners and an intermittent role as a father both with their biological children and with stepchildren. The men sometimes started new relationships, impacting on their ability to maintain contact with their children from previous relationships.

Had a split with the mother of my boys. I'm now back with the mother of my two girls. I've connected back with her (14).

Many of the men had become fathers at an early age. This father had his first child at 14 years of age, but he has never met him:

I'm told that he is mine I don't know his name. I've had three partners (43).

The above extract highlights multiple partnerships, a common experience among the fathers interviewed. In the process of re-partnering or incarceration, they frequently lose contact with some or all of their children. In many situations the mother restricts or stops access to the child. Through this imposed separation the men miss out on the direct experience of fatherhood.

My son was taken away from me when he was two by his mother ... I've had no contact with my son since (31).

I was living with them prior to coming into custody, but my wife has now moved on so I plan to live with my mother when I'm released. The children are currently living with their mother on the Gold Coast [at least 1000km away]. She has a new partner and has another child (46).

The following extract illustrates the man's experience of developing a relationship with a child and then finding out he was not the biological father. Nevertheless, he goes on to affirm his acceptance of the two-year old girl as his daughter.

My two-year old is in foster care with my partner's sister. At first I thought she was mine. She ended up not being mine, but I identify as being her Dad. I named her. She was born two months after I came to gaol (53).

Several of the men were stepfathers. This man describes having six children, although only two were his biological children:

...the others 'call me Dad'. I am estranged from their mother....The youngest is currently living with his cousin, under DOCS [community services] supervision. Second youngest is living with his drunken mother in [country town]. The three eldest are currently in gaol. The other one was in [town] last I heard. (65).

A few men had had extended periods caring for their children prior to their incarceration. This man tells a story of trying to improve life for his children by moving to another town. Unfortunately, his attempts were disrupted due to his arrest for a crime committed before his children were born.

I became the main carer for my children about a year ago. [My partner] signed over my two children – she was a drug user. We moved away from [the city] ... and moved up to [country town] on our own – it was bliss. I rented privately and had a good relationship with the landlady. She often said to me 'you dote on those children'. I had a good job and also volunteer work. (27)

This next man reflects on his experience of fathering and alludes to the leadership role he is taking with the younger men, providing guidance about fathering.

A lot of the young fellas in gaol do look up to me and the younger fellas have got kids of their own and I show them the right path to take. I don't want their children to miss out on what my children missed out on. I show them there's a better side of life than this place. Show them that they can achieve their goals in life (124)

Feelings of Separation and Missing Out

A consistent theme in the interviews was the fathers' sense of missing out on significant events in their children's lives – or even the mundane or routine activities that most parents take for granted as their children grow and mature.

I never had father contact with my kids ... I don't know what colours they like or what size they are. I don't know anything about my kids, but I know in my heart they are my kids. I just live like that... not knowing. I'd like to be able to see more (65)

When asked about their strengths as a parent, many men recalled nostalgically sharing everyday activities with their children such as taking them to school, going to the park, playing sport or going fishing, outings which were no longer possible.

My kids were still very young when I was arrested. I used to play Duck-Duck-Goose with them (91)

They spoke with regret and sadness of their inability to be there for their children at special milestones in their lives.

She's just started walking – two steps and she falls down. I should be the one to catch her. That's what gets you the most. (9)

My Mum brings him in regularly... That's really good - but bittersweet. I enjoy it, but then I look back on the things I miss out on. He started talking while I was in here and I have to listen to it over the phone which is pretty hard. (105)

My son just got a scholarship to [private secondary school]. I wanted to be there and that was a bit hard. I can't celebrate their achievements. (34)

Some of the fathers recounted their distress at being unable to help their children through difficulties in their daily lives.

My son was acting up in school. Something I learnt in here [is] that instead of being harsh and strict on my kids I should just talk to them. (28)

[One challenge is] being there for my kids when they are upset. (31)

I was always the one they contact if they have problems at school. They always come to me. I can't do that from here (96)

This father describes his distress when his brother's daughter died in a car accident. He links his brother's trauma to his own children and the impact of his own feelings.

He buried her on Fathers' Day... It made me realise that things can happen. It brought me back to reality and showed me that you do need to keep an eye on them and keep them close... I can imagine what he is going through. I've got children of my own. It's very, very scary. (124)

Other fathers expressed their regret at being unable to provide a positive role model to their children.

Being away is the main challenge – not showing him the ropes or being a father-figure. (36).

Not being out there and being able to stop my kids from doing things wrong and give them some sort of structure... there's lots going on with my second. (115)

The fathers who no longer had contact with their children spoke of their distress. This father identifies his potential inability to recognise his son. One of the possible causes is not having up-to-date photos of his son to assist him maintain a physical image of his son.

I haven't seen him for two and a half years ... My ex won't let me see him... I wouldn't even recognise him I think. My Dad has seen him a couple of times, but he is old school and doesn't take photos. (103)

A lack of everyday memories for both this father and his children is a point of sadness and regret for this man. He highlights that the only memories his children will have of their early years will be visiting him in prison.

The only thing that burns me from being in gaol, is that I didn't have a chance to spend the first 10 years of the kids' life. There's no memories and that burns me. They only remember visits. (121)

The fathers recounted many regrets about the impact of their absence on their relationship with their children and the sense that they were missing out on vital aspects of their growing up. Some fathers indicated that they had contact with their children through phone calls, letters or visits, although only one-quarter had regular visits from their children. The men valued these forms of communication, but they clearly did not compensate for missing important milestones or daily togetherness with their children. The impact was particularly severe for those fathers who did not have regular or even intermittent contact with their children.

Becoming a Better Dad

A constant theme throughout the interviews was the desire to be a better parent than their own father had been or simply to be a 'good' Dad. Several participants had attended a parenting program in custody and their motivations often revolved around their determination to be a better father. One father describes signing up for the parenting course. He stated that completing the parenting program will not only help to improve his status with his 'missus' but will also mean that his family will no longer be able to accuse him of being a 'bad' parent.:

... I just wanted to sign up to be a better parent and be there for my kids and just show them the life that I never had when I was growing up. Also to be a good Dad and be qualified to be a Dad and that way my missus can't say I'm a bad parent and she

knows that I've done research in this side of the field, about children. A bit of evidence that I'm a good Dad. (14)

Many of the fathers described lacking models of sensitive, responsive parenting during their childhood. This father wants to be a 'better dad' for his children by learning new skills and ways of communicating.

To be a better dad, how to interact with my children, how to answer the questions that inevitably they're going to ask (64).

The next man made a connection by identifying his children as a motivator to stay out of prison following the program.

I wanted to see if it [parenting program] could help me figure out a few things to understand with my children. Try and look at a positive way of staying out of prison and spending more time with them (16).

This man gained insight that he was not as good a father as he thought which motivated him to endeavour to improve his fathering abilities.

I always thought I was a decent father, but I'm obviously not because I'm in gaol. So thought I'd touch up on a few things ... Anything that could make me a better man, a better father, I'd jump at a chance to learn (55).

In the following quote, the father challenges his son's perception of him as a father and takes a realistic view of the impact of his incarceration on their relationship.

I was talking to my son the other day and I said 'Daddy's doing a fathering course' and he said 'what for, Dad? You're a good dad'. I said 'Oh mate. Thanks for that darling, but Daddy could be a better dad'. And he said 'how? You take us to the park and you take us to football and you take us to the pictures'. [But] a lot of the time I'm in gaol. (64)

The fathers who had daughters raised specific concerns. This man recognises his lack of knowledge about how to be a parent to girls.

I realised my daughters are getting older. [I need] things to help me along as they get a bit older knowing they're girls and I'm a male. There may be things I don't know. Tools that I could use (56).

In this final quote the man reflects on his behaviour and his lack of sensitivity to the needs of his family. He describes the actions he is going to take once released.

I will remember the important parts of being a responsible parent. Instead of just making decisions and leaving them [children] and just coming to gaol. (1)

A Better Life for Their Children and Families

All the men were looking to the future. While some men would not be able to have contact with their children once released, many were anticipating reuniting with their children. The frequently expressed their desire for their children to have a better life than they had experienced. The men had the same aspirations and concerns for their children that are commonly voiced by Australian parents. The first father describes his hopes for his children that are very different from his own life.

The main thing I want is that I want my children to have the life that I never had when I was growing up. I want them to go to University and travel the world and achieve some things in life (14).

The father in this quote continues to identify his own expectations for his release and how this will positively impact on the lives of young people in his community.

My main goal in life is to be a youth worker, in the community with younger people. I could speak to them about some of the things that they are doing. Because I've got experience in the negative side of the field, I can give them a firsthand account and tell them that this is not the life they deserve, that they deserve better (14).

This father identifies that putting his children's needs before his own is important for being a responsible parent. He recognises that although he satisfied his children's material needs, he had neglected their emotional needs.

God forbid if one of my children came to gaol. I would be shattered and it would be my fault. So I can't wait to be a Dad again. Not this bloody stupid person that would get on the drink and he'd smoke pot. My children never went without; it wasn't the case that I was taking the money [for drugs or alcohol]. But they did go without – because they didn't have my time and my undivided attention. I can't wait to give them my undivided attention. (64)

The fathers spoke of being desperately keen to leave prison but were concerned about their barriers they would experience. These barriers had the potential to impact on their families' well-being due to the stigma and limited options associated with being an ex-prisoner.

Finding housing is pretty hard. One of my mates owned a motel and ... that's where I was living with [my son]. It was all right. (103)

There is not enough support for single fathers. I have dealt with the Department of Housing who don't understand why I would want to live with my children. Also support groups and parents groups aren't geared for dads. (27)

[Challenge is] living my own life, getting my own place, stable job, stable income, so my children can come and stay with me, so I'm not absent from their lives. Just normal, general things – it's hard to do in my position. (28)

The next man makes the connection between being a better father and gaining and sustaining employment. He attributes this understanding to being in custody.

We know that [we have] to get a job... it's easy to get a job but no one has shown us how to keep a job. That's part of being a parent, being a Dad. What can we do to improve and be better fathers? (62)

DISCUSSION

Overwhelmingly, the men in this study wanted to be the very best fathers they could be for their children. They had hopes and desires for their children, especially for a life that does not

parallel their own patterns of abuse and criminality. The men expressed feelings of guilt and concern about the distress they were causing their children and described a sense of loss that they were not there for the important events in their children's lives. Yet, without significant intervention children with an incarcerated parent are likely to be set on a similar trajectory of criminality (Beaver, 2013).

Several fathers identified an increasing awareness of the importance of a firm connection with their partners and children. Yet, offenders' relationships with children and partners have been found to be much more tenuous than with other family members such as mothers or grandmothers (La Vigne, Naser, Brooks, & Castro, 2005). Some of the men recognised that they would have minimal if any contact with their children on release, as their partner or the children's carer had actively restricted or stopped contact. Creating opportunities for the fathers to have contact with their children in child-friendly environments within the correctional facilities would be a beginning step for many fathers to reconnect.

The men had often been parented by their mothers or grandmothers as sole caregivers, due to an absent father. Several reported that their fathers had died, been incarcerated or had disappeared. For some men, contact with a father figure was mainly with a stepfather or their mother's transient partners. These relationships were often described as strained or abusive, resulting in out-of-home care, being placed in juvenile facilities or living on the street. A common story throughout the interviews was a lack of a father to provide safe, responsive and appropriate care. This loss potentially meant the men were unable to have the intimacy with their father that fosters incidental learning as a part of interpersonal interaction (Marsick, & Watkins, 2001) and enabling a strengthening of the relationship between father and son.

Having a positive nurturing relationship with their incarcerated fathers is recognised as a significant preventative measure for children to reduce the risk of perpetuating the cycle of violence and incarceration (Maldonado, 2006). Ball (2009) found that incarcerated fathers who experienced any type of childhood physical abuse were more likely to report abusing their own children. This risk of abuse does not negate the understanding that families and the community can benefit when incarcerated fathers and their children are more involved with each other (Lee, et al., 2012). Ensuring fathers were adequately prepared to interact positively with their children requires a greater focus on supporting the development of parenting capacity and skills while incarcerated. This support also requires assistance with other aspects of their childhood experiences and integration back into the community including psychological intervention and adequate support to minimise the intergenerational impact of the trauma endured (Carlson, & Shafer, 2010; Ball, 2009; Dixon, Browne, & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2009).

Existing policies and practices may require review to enable and support more regular contact between the fathers and their children (Swanson, Lee, Sansone, & Tatum 2013; Lee et al., 2012). Additional strategies to provide aftercare when released has been identified as important in assisting with fathers' reintegration back into their families and into the fathering role (Ball, 2009). Children who have been deceived about their parents' whereabouts or have not been able to maintain contact with their parent will encounter greater reunification challenges when the parent is released than children who had a stronger connection during the period of incarceration (La Vigne et al., 2008).

Even though few men had been exposed to positive fathering practices as children, they did express a desire to be a different type of father for their children. Several fathers

demonstrated insight into the impact of their behaviour on their children's lives and some spoke of the need to learn 'stuff' their fathers should have told them. This highlights the key importance of having access to male mentors who provide a positive fathering model and enable participants to talk about parenting, relationships, culture, masculinity and other issues. Having such a positive role model frequently compensates for the negative influences they encountered as children or while in prison (Bushfield, 2004). Parenting programs for incarcerated fathers have generated some success in improving self-mastery and self-esteem, positive parenting attitudes, parenting knowledge and satisfaction (Martinez, & Burraston, 2013; Hoffman, Byrd, & Kightlinger, 2010; Wilson, Gonzalez, Romero, Henry, & Cerbana, 2010; Eddy, Loper, & Tuerk, 2006).

This research was limited in that the incarcerated fathers were recruited from the correctional service in only one Australian state. This service is likely to have different practices and programs available for the men from those available in other states or countries. Interviewing fathers from other jurisdictions may have yielded different results. However, despite this limitation, the use of AI and semi-structured interviews provided a great depth of both demographic and qualitative data.

CONCLUSION

The potential contribution of appropriate and sensitive fathering to breaking the cycle of violence is now well accepted. Many men participating in this study demonstrated insight into the impact of their behaviour and incarceration on their children. They all spoke of wanting to be 'better fathers' for their children than their own experiences of being fathered. Some had reflected on their parenting during their period of incarceration and were clearly

receptive to interventions aimed at increasing their knowledge and skills to better connect with their children.

The lack of a father figure during the childhood of many of these men was a prominent theme in their interviews. Providing interventions that address this paucity of male parenting models and providing concrete assistance with reunification with their children and families are the first steps to supporting them to achieve their desire to be 'better' fathers.

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TABLES

Table 1: *Demographic profile, fathers in Breaking the Cycle study (N=64)*

ITEM	
<i>Age (years)</i>	
Mean (range)	33.2 (19 – 52)
<i>Country of birth</i>	
Proportion born in Australia	93.8%
<i>Aboriginality</i>	
Indigenous	70.3%
Not Indigenous, but has Indigenous children	1.6%
Not Indigenous	28.1%
<i>Education & Training</i>	
Proportion finished Year 10 school	54.7%
Proportion with TAFE or trade qualification	37.5%
<i>Age left family home</i>	
Proportion still living at home at arrest	6.3%
Mean age (range) (years)	15.0 (9 – 25)
<i>Main caregiver during childhood</i>	
Both parents	34.4%
Mother	37.5%
Father	1.6%
Grandparent/s	10.9%
Foster parent/s	3.1%
Other	12.3%
<i>Own parents incarcerated during childhood</i>	

Neither	70.3%
Mother	3.1%
Father	21.9%
Both parents	4.7%
<i>Spent time in out of home care in childhood</i>	23.4%
<i>Number of children</i>	
Mean (range)	2.7 (1 – 9)
<i>Step/foster children</i>	
Proportion with step children	15.4%
Mean number	2.8
<i>Age of oldest child (years)</i>	
Mean (range)	12.9 (0.8 – 34)
<i>Age of youngest child (years)</i>	
Mean (range)	5.7 (0 – 18)
<i>Lived with children before gaol</i>	
All children	35.9%
Some of children	28.1%
None of children	35.9%
<i>Plans to live with children post-release</i>	
All children	46.9%
Some of children	32.8%
None of children	18.8%
Unsure	1.6%
<i>Child/ren's current living arrangements*</i>	
Lives independently	15.6%

Other parent	84.4%
Grandparent/s	17.2%
Other relative	3.1%
Partner (not child's biological parent)	7.8%
Foster parent (not related)	4.7%
Living with relative via child protection agency	9.4%
Child in gaol or juvenile justice	4.7%
Don't know where child is	3.1%
Other arrangement	3.1%
<i>Children know I am in prison</i>	
All my children	62.5%
Some of my children	21.9%
None of my children	14.1%
Don't know if they know	1.6%
<i>Children visit</i>	
No children visit	32.8%
Some children visit occasionally	9.4%
All children visit occasionally	14.1%
Some children visit regularly	4.7%
All children visit regularly	21.9%
Used to have visits but no longer	17.2%
Ever received a visit from children	62.5%
Speak to children by telephone at least weekly	65.6%
Write letters to children at least weekly	36.1%
<i>Sentence details</i>	

Mean length (range) (months)	66.1 (2 – 240)
Proportion not yet sentenced	29.6%
<i>Time between incarceration and interview</i>	
Mean (range) incarceration to date (months)	19.7 (0.5 – 114)
<i>Prior sentences</i>	
Mean number (range)	5.9 (0 – 21)
<i>Security risk rating</i>	
Low	7.0%
Medium – low	3.5%
Medium	29.8%
Medium – high	47.4%
High	12.3%
Proportion attending parenting program	46.9%

*More than one option per family