

**Barnardo's Scotland briefing on the Member's Debate: An Unfair Sentence:
All babies count - 26th February 2015**

Key Points

- There is currently no systematic approach to quantifying how many babies are affected by parental imprisonment in Scotland. But almost two thirds of female prisoners (65%) and half of male prisoners (52%) report having children.¹
- Young women in prison are often lacking information about the processes affecting their children whilst they are serving a sentence. They tend to be isolated from family and community support, with infrequent visits from their children.
- The number of Criminal Justice Social Work Reports being requested, and the number of reports being submitted is continuing to fall.
- Impact Assessments should be introduced to ensure that babies with a parent in prison are recognised and counted in order for us to better understand the longer term impacts of the justice system on them.
- 65% of boys with a parent in prison will likely go on to offend themselves. Within our own work in Scotland we are finding that a lot of the young men we are working with in prison do not have contact with their own fathers.

The criminal justice system can affect babies in several ways:

- Parents involved in the justice system often have complex needs that can impact on the care an infant receives.
- Mothers caring for a baby when a partner is imprisoned can be vulnerable to mental health problems and face multiple issues associated with social disadvantage such as poverty, housing problems, loss of wages and so on.
- Fathers also have key role to play in the early years of their baby's life, therefore promoting positive parenting for men in prison is important.

Evidence shows that creating strong, positive attachments in the early years is vital for children's physical, social and emotional development² – where a parent is involved with the justice system this positive attachment can be disrupted with long-term negative impacts on the child's development.

Impact on Women

¹ Scottish Prison Service (2011) '13th Prisoner survey'

² Howe, D. (2005) 'Child Abuse and Neglect: Attachment, development and intervention' Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

In the last 18 months Barnardo's Scotland youth work staff in HMP Cornton Vale have worked with 5 young women under 21yrs who had children. **None of these children were living with their fathers whilst their mother was in prison.** 1 child was living with foster carers, 1 was living with a grandparent and 1 was living with an aunt, 2 children were in the process of being freed for adoption. Our project workers were aware that most of the young women were lacking information about the processes affecting their children whilst they were in prison. The young women were isolated from family and community support, with infrequent visits from their children.

Intergenerational offending

The issue of intergenerational offending is a pressing one across the UK. It has been estimated that **65%** of boys with a parent in prison will likely go on to offend themselves, and that prisoners are **two and a half times** as likely to have had a family member convicted of a criminal offence³. Within our own work in Scotland we are finding that most of the young men we are working with in prison do not have contact with their own fathers. We need to get better at recognising these patterns; there is a wealth of evidence around the importance of children developing strong and secure parental relationships in their early years. If, through these kinds of parenting programmes we can help these young dads to understand the importance of leading by example for their own babies then we can start to make inroads into these cycles of intergenerational offending.

Assessment

The NSPCC/Barnardo's report recommends the introduction of Child Impact Assessments. Statistics released in May by the Scottish Government showed that **less than 1/3rd of convicted offenders were the subject of a Criminal Justice Social Work Report in 2012/13.** The number of Criminal Justice Social Work Reports being requested, and the number of reports being submitted is continuing to fall.⁴ This is concerning for Barnardo's Scotland as these reports are currently the only way for external agencies to find out about the dependent children an offender might have, even when conducted these reports only touch upon the childcare responsibilities and tend to be largely offender focused. We believe **all children** should have an assessment of their wellbeing carried out if their parent or carer is sentenced to custody in order to prevent the longer term adverse effects on their physical, social and emotional development, this is particularly important for infants at the very early stages of development.

Our services

Barnardo's Scotland provides two crucial services directly related to babies and the criminal justice system.

- **Parenting Matters in HM YOI Polmont.** Run in partnership with the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) the programme uses the principles of hands-on

³ Social Exclusion Unit (2002) 'Reducing reoffending by ex-prisoners' London: Social Exclusion Unit

⁴ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0045/00451608.pdf>

experiential and group work learning to help the young men in Polmont bond with their babies during family visits, whilst encouraging and supporting them to become better fathers and create lasting attachments with their children.

Research tells us that generally (assuming no child protection concerns) it is important for children and babies to maintain or build the bond with their father whilst in prison. We make this possible by improving the quality of the visit experience and providing, where possible and practical, special attachment sessions for parents and infants in partnership with SPS. Below are some quotes from the young men who have been involved in Parenting Matters:

'You get to learn about how the babies' brains work, it's mad'
'It's made me realise what's good for babies, I know to read them a book or sing a song like the bookbug'
'Go to the group it helps you bond with your family'
'You can only teach them so much then you have to show them'

Through this work we have also been working with the hard-to-reach partners of these young men as they bring the babies into Polmont. We have been finding that these female partners are often struggling to cope and are in need of support themselves, without the parenting programme targeted at the fathers; these mothers would remain in the community on their own with very young babies, often struggling and reluctant to ask for help.

- The **Thrive Public Social Partnership** in which we are lead partners works in HMP Perth and throughout Perth & Kinross and Angus local authority areas to provide support to offenders and their families both in the prison and in the community.

Our staff in this service are seeing really positive results, especially the community aspect of the service which works with the partners and their babies outside as well as promoting positive family relationships through attachment sessions for individual families, and play activities within HMP Perth. Most of the families working with Thrive are not currently accessing other services, highlighting that the families, partners and children left behind are often hidden and hard to reach.

Both of these services use the **Five to Thrive**⁵ positive attachment approach as the overarching framework for our attachment based sessions.

For more details please contact:

Nicki Wray, Barnardo's Scotland, 111 Oxbgangs Road North, Edinburgh, EH14 1ED nicola.wray@barnardos.org.uk / 0131 446 7033

⁵ Five to Thrive is an attachment-based approach to positive parenting which puts attachment relationships at the centre and encourages parents to put in place five key building blocks for healthy brain development in babies: Respond, Cuddle, Relax, Play and Talk. <http://www.fivetothrive.org.uk/>