

Mending The Broken Bond

The post-release experience of imprisoned mothers

A case-study report

by Jude Butler

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“... ‘imprisonment which is a temporary condition, is not, (in itself), evidence of a mother’s lack of desire or ability to perform parental duties. We should not use imprisonment as the basis for dissolving a mother’s ties and responsibilities with her family’. Nor should imprisonment be used as the basis for a denial of the requirements of what is in the ‘best interests of the child’ ”.

Policy statement, August 1992
The Mothers and Young Babies Committee
Department of Corrective Services

“My son has been so angry with me since I got out. ...I had to tell him to do something. I don’t like doing it but he turned around and said ‘You can’t make me do that’he thinks he can put it over mum, and because I’m not squeaky clean, and he knows that, he says ‘You can’t preach to me. You can’t make me do that’” And I said to him: ‘Yes I can. Just because I’ve made some mistakes doesn’t mean I’m not mum. I don’t want you to make the same mistakes’” .

Julie, March 1994

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METHODOLOGY

There were a variety of methods used when undertaking this research. All the methods were centred around semi-structured interviews with women who:

- * had served at least one sentence in a NSW prison and had subsequently been released within the two year period prior to the interview; and
- * had at least one child under the age of eighteen years prior to imprisonment.

Any other similarities in the profile of the group are co-incidental and were not part of the selection criteria.

Due to the restriction of the sample size and to the aim of the project -to provide an avenue by which these women could have a voice for their experiences- the methodology is primarily qualitative.

Making contact with the mothers:

A range of organisations and individuals were approached by phone, personal contact or post, requesting introduction to mothers who met the criteria and were willing to be interviewed for the research.

All the individuals and organisations were supportive of the research project but few were able to provide introductions. This was probably due to:

1. the fact that the majority of workers in the criminal justice system have heavy workloads;
2. the difficulty in contacting prisoners after release because they are often transient;
3. that there are few organisations which supply support to women post-release - and only two, of which I am aware, which offer assistance to mothers in particular, (Children of Prisoner's Support Group and Gutherie House).

Interviews with mothers:

Twenty ex-prisoner mothers were interviewed. Seventeen of these interviews were undertaken in the mother's place of residence and three within Mulawa Correctional Centre. The women were given the choice of having the interview taped on an audio machine or for the interviewer to take written notes. 14 women chose to have the interview taped. None of the women interviewed in prison chose to do so.

The interview consisted of a number of data collection questions and a number of open-ended questions structured in seven sections*:

- A. about the mother;
- B. about the children;
- C. about the mother and children pre-imprisonment;
- D. about the mother's release;
- E. about the mother and child during imprisonment;
- F. about the mother and children post-release;
- G. general information.

The interviews gave time and opportunity for the mothers to add information that they saw as relevant but was not asked. Not all the information gained in this way can be collated or noted for this research but may prove useful as indicators of areas which need further inquiry. Reflecting on their imprisonment and the impact that it had on their children was an emotional experience for the women, and considerable time was spent during and after the interviews allowing the women to talk about their personal experience and concerns regarding their children.

My experience of having worked within the prison system for ten years proved of unquestionable value. It enabled me to develop a rapport with the mothers quickly and easily, and meant that I was familiar with the prison sub-culture and its language. The downside to this familiarity was the danger of allowing assumptions about the intended meaning of an response to overrule more precise interrogation. It is my hope that, in the majority of instances, the informal and open-ended questioning method, allowed for enough discussion to provide an unambiguous context for the information given by the mothers.

Statistical data

The statistical information was compiled from available data in the NSW Department of Corrective Services' NSW Prison Census 1993 and Women's Action Plan 1994; The Bureau of Crime Statistics and the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

This data, surprisingly does not include numbers of female admissions to prison each year, but rather an average daily female prison population. Since the great majority of women serve less than a year in any one sentence, the number of women affected by imprisonment each year is greater than the daily average population.

* The full list of questions appears at Appendix 1.

Further, this data is compiled on women as a whole and does not differentiate women with children from women without children within the female prison population. There are no statistics compiled on how many prisoners of either gender have children, where these children are or who cares for them.

The 1993 NSW Prison Census reported an average daily female prison population of 319.1. The number of female releases from May 1 1993 - April 30 1994 was 931 according to the Bureau of Crime Statistics, and has been increasing for the past decade. Children of Prisoners estimates that 4,000 children in NSW are affected at any given time by the imprisonment of either mother or father or both.

Other information

Informal conversation was carried out with a variety of workers within the prison system including departmental staff, community organisations and women's groups. This was primarily to check accuracy of understanding and assessment of findings in the research.

A literature research was undertaken using women, prisons, mothers, children, post-imprisonment and families as identifiers. A collection of papers written the experience of women and mothers in prison was made. Very little information could be found on the post-release experience of women and nothing specifically on the post-release experience of mothers.

The importance of the time frame of the report

The information given by the women related to their experiences while in jail. Except for the three women who had subsequently been imprisoned, the mothers had all been released prior to March of 1994.

Some of the prison procedures and conditions they describe have subsequently been changed and there are plans to change others already under way. Women's Action Plan -a three year strategy for female inmates in NSW Correctional facilities was released by the Department of Corrective Services in January 1994*. Although attention given to women in prison is welcome, only time will tell how many of these proposals will be implemented and how successful they will prove to be.

* An outline of the Women's Action Plan recommendations, as they relate to mothers, appear at Appendix 5.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The daily average female population in NSW prisons increased by 150% between 1980 and 1993. In the same time the male population increased by 60%. The majority of women imprisoned are in jail for short sentences for non-violent crimes.*

While it may be argued that it is society's will to imprison these women, there is no evidence that separation from their children should be part of that punishment or that the children themselves should be punished. At the core of our criminal justice system is an assumption of 'individual punishment for individual crime'. As the women interviewed for this report clearly articulate, this assumption is false because it excludes the experience of their children and families.

Sixteen of twenty, (or 80%), of the mothers interviewed resumed care of some or all of their children. The aim to re-unite families in every possible case is official policy of government welfare agencies and the stated policy of the Mothers and Young Children's Committee of the Department of Corrective Services.

However the over-whelming finding of this report is that, although the majority of women are re-united with their children, it is a difficult, often traumatic experience for mothers and children. The systems in place do nothing to facilitate the aim of restoration of families. In fact, it may be argued, that the systems positively prejudice against this aim.

From arrest through sentencing, imprisonment and post-release there is almost no recognition or consideration given to the fact that these inmate women are mothers.

They are "de-maternalised" from the beginning of the arrest process; separated from their children; given inadequate visiting, and then often in very alienating conditions; distanced from information and decision-making about their children; and then expected to re-claim a role which has become foreign to them and to their children.

It is extraordinary indeed that so many of the women reported that they have been able, against these odds, to re-build satisfactory relationships with their children. Even more extraordinary when the majority have had to do so as sole parents.

* Source: Women's Action Plan

This report recommends:

That women with children coming before the criminal justice system are identified as mothers.

That the treatment of these mothers be conducive to maintaining their responsibilities in caring for their children.

This could be achieved by:

Data

- That accurate, current data be compiled on the numbers of children with inmate parents to underline policy making on issues relating to mothers and fathers in prison

Arrest

- That a policy should be developed and implemented for police officers which would assist them in allowing mothers the time and environment to separate from their children with the least amount of trauma possible

Sentencing

- That pre-sentence reports be mandatory for mothers. These reports would include the mother's maternal responsibilities; possible alternatives for child care; the mother's drug and alcohol history; and possible non-custodial options
- That imprisonment be used as a last resort for mothers

Visiting / contact

- That if imprisonment is the only option then visitation needs to be child-focused and flexible, allowing both mother and child the most intimate relationship possible; including the provision of play equipment in visiting areas that can be used by both mother and child; regular and frequent children's visiting days be allowed; and specialised training for custodial officers be instigated to enable them to encourage the imprisoned mother/child relationship
- That phone contact be flexible enough for children to contact their mothers in prison when the need arises

Support for mothers

- That support and education groups be established and maintained for mothers in prison
- That mothers be able to purchase children's gifts and be able to give them to their children when the children are visiting

Appropriate accommodation

- That more beds in minimum security prison be provided so that women can be accommodated in a facility suited to their classification

Sections

- That the use of section 29 (2) (c) be maximised;
- That information about this section be made available and automatic to mothers when entering prison

Methadone

- That women on the methadone program be given the same opportunities for residing in a minimum security institution, work's release, day leave and weekend leave as other women in the prison system

Support for the carer

- That families friends and agencies caring for the imprisoned mother's children be given on-going and specialised support and education enabling them to understand and encourage the imprisoned mother/ child relationship

Support for the child

- That specialised counselling be made readily available to the children of imprisoned mothers
- That an information kit be developed to assist educators, child-carers, social workers and other interested people in meeting the special needs of the children of imprisoned mothers

Post release support

- That post-release support services for ex-inmate mothers and their children be expanded; including specialised, individual family case work and support groups

THE MOTHERS

Jenny is 33 and lives in a de facto relationship. Her two children, a 15 year old son and 8 year old daughter live with her mother and Jenny cares for a 23 month-old step daughter. She served two and a half years for break, enter and steal involving a stolen motor car. It was not her first sentence. Her son was 11 and her daughter 4 when she started the sentence.

Gay is a 30 year old who has served several sentences relating to her history of drug addiction. Her most recent being two months for assault. She has a 7 year old son.

Sue is 31. Her husband was in jail at the time of the interview. She has two surviving daughters 8 and 10, having lost a third at 13 months. One of her daughters has a disabling skin disorder. She has served three sentences, her most recent for shop-lifting. When I met her she and her daughters were living in a half-way house. Her daughters were 9 and 7 when she commenced her most recent sentence.

Beryl is a 37 year old Aboriginal woman with three sons aged 21, 18 and 9. She lives in a half-way house having lost custody of her youngest while in prison. Beryl says she didn't understand the repercussions of her actions when signing the custody agreement. She is currently contesting the custody order. Her most recent sentence was 4 weeks for soliciting.

Pauline is 26 and in a de facto relationship and was pregnant with her second child when we met. Her first child is an 8 year old girl. She, her partner and the child live with Pauline's parents. She was sentenced to fifteen months on a shop-lifting and resisting arrest charge, and served three before release on appeals bail. She is currently facing further charges.

Sandra is 27 and living in a de facto relationship with her three children -two girls seven years and eighteen months, and a son 6. The youngest is the child of her current partner. She has been to jail once serving six months for shop-lifting. Her eldest child was five years old and her youngest 6 weeks old when she went to prison.

Deborah is 33 and separated and was living with her 4 year old son in a half-way house. Her son was three and a half when she was sent to prison for marijuana possession. Even though it was a first offence she was sentenced to 9 months and was released after two weeks on appeal.

Kate is a 36 year old Aboriginal mother of a 16 year old girl. She has a long history of jail sentences, the most recent being three months for assault and robbery. Her daughter is in long-term foster care. A long-term addict, Kate was resident in a detox centre when I met her. She has since been re-admitted to jail, serving six months for assault.

Gloria is 24 and single and is suffering from a serious illness. Her son is three and a half and was eighteen months old when she was sentenced for breaking bail conditions on a charge of assault and robbery involving a stolen motor vehicle. She served eighteen months and is now living with her son.

Di is 24, separated and lives with her two and a half year old son. He was six weeks old and suffering from a breathing disorder associated with premature birth when both Di and the child's father were sentenced to eighteen months for possession of marijuana.

Margaret is 27 separated from the father of her three children and suffers from a permanent disability. She has two sons 12 and 8. The eldest is an asthmatic and the other was born with brain damage. Margaret's mother has custody of both boys. A three and half year old girl lives with Margaret. Her daughter was two and a half when Margaret was sentenced to five months for fraud. It was not her first sentence.

Natasha is 33, separated and had returned to prison when I interviewed her. She was serving a two year term for malicious wounding. Her two sons 7 and 9 were being cared for by her mother. Her elder son was five when Tasha began her first sentence and seven when she started her current one.

Clare is 34 and separated and has served three sentence the most recent ten days for possession with supply of marijuana had been served in the month prior to our interview. Clare lives with her son is now two and a half.

Lucy is 28 and has two children, a 8 year old boy and a 5 year old girl. The children were 4 and 1 year when Lucy began her three-year sentence and are now in permanent foster care. Lucy has no access to her children and is currently contesting the custody order.

Jessie is 23 and single and lives in a half-way house. She served six months for assault and robbery and entered prison when her daughter was 3 months old. She has custody of her child who is 10 months old

Louise is 37 and was in prison when we met following revocation of parole on a sentence for possession. She has two daughters 6 and 5, and a 2 year old son. The girls were 2 and 1 year when she was initially imprisoned. Louise's mother has been given custody of the three children and they have been told that Louise is in hospital.

Ruth is a 23 year old Aboriginal who was in prison on a robbery with wounding charge. She previously served a month on remand. Currently her three children two sons - 3 years, and 6 months- and a 2 year old daughter live with her sister in another state. The youngest child was born while Ruth was out on bail awaiting sentencing.

Julie is 33, separated and lives with her 13 year old son and 11 year old daughter. She had served one term - a month of an eleven month sentence begun six months previously and was out on appeals bail when we met. Both Julie and the children's father had been incarcerated for robbery on the same charge at the same time.

Nicole is 32, separated and has the children a boy of 8 and a girl of 2. The children were 5 years and 6 months when Nicole began her sentence of 16 months for stealing. She currently lives with her mother and the children.

Kylie is 33 and separated. She has two children, an 8 year old boy and 6 year old girl. She had served six months for robbery in the year prior to the interview and was now living with her children.

FINDINGS

ARREST

The arrest of an individual is usually a traumatic event. It can involve the use of physical force and/or weapons. Arrests occur anytime of the night or day and at any venue including the individual's home. Six of the mothers interviewed were with their children when they were arrested. These mothers expressed concern for their children and the impact of their presence at the time of arrest.

There currently appears to be no written policy on procedure for protection of children at the time of arrest of a parent or parents.*

Ruth: *The children were present. I was feeding them breakfast. It all happened so quickly I couldn't even get to say goodbye to them. My little boy didn't understand what was happening and just kept asking for mummy. He wanted to come with me and he was crying....my family said he just kept asking for me and walked around carrying my photo.*

Gloria: *It was like they dragged him away from me. He was a baby...the coppers took him and then one of the bikies took him and the bikies handed him over to Blake Hospital.*

Natasha: *The police arrived at my home at night and dragged my son out of bed...he's frightened now of police. I was put in the back of the bullwagon and my son was put in the front. I had no time to talk to him about anything.*

Margaret: *I was at home alone with two of the kids. My elder son was out swimming with his uncle. Two detectives came to the door. We were all in the car about to be driven away ...I was worried because I knew my son would be home soon ...when my father came driving up. 'What's happening' he said. I asked him to look after the kids .*

* Children of Prisoners' Support Group wrote to the then Minister for Police, Mr. Terry Griffiths M.P. in February 1993 asking for an outline of official policy on this issue. The reply assured COPSG that the police were aware of the needs of the children of arrested persons, and that Department of Youth and Community Services were involved by the police if there was no carer for the child contactee' following arrest.

Clare: ...they came in and surrounded the place. They were threatening me that if I didn't give information, they would take my son and I would never see again and that sort of stuff. My son was in the back bedroom with my husband....when they went in the room, my son was on the bed in a little rocker and they actually put a gun to my husband's head in front of him...at 9-10 months, that's going to affect him. And it did affect him because later when he was just over one, and my cousin was playing with a gun, just a toy, he started freaking out and screaming....

The impact of arrest is not confined to the point of arrest or even if the child/children are present at the point of arrest. All the women stated that their arrest had a negative impact on their children. The impact was centred on the forced separation of mother and child, or the impending separation for those women on bail awaiting conviction or sentencing.

Sandra: ...my eldest daughter was five going on ten, and she used to worry, really worry that I was going to go to jail. She used to freak out about it. sometimes at night she would be in bed crying and going 'oh, you are going to jail, mummy' and I would say 'We don't know that yet. Your father is just assuming it. We don't know.' I knew, but I didn't want to tell her that.

Deborah: Well, at first my son thought it was the police's fault. He was hating police...he went through this thing of hating police. But then I had to just sit down and tell him about it...that I had broken the law and just because I thought it was a silly law, the fact is it is still illegal to smoke pot, and I had it and the police found it and that is why I was arrested. I think he sort of, he seemed to understand, and he seemed to stop the hatred so much for the police.....

Margaret: The impact of my being arrested was a big impact. My son was broken-hearted. He wrote me a letter and he said 'Dear Mum, thanks for letting us down again'. I remember that bit because I started crying. I thought 'Poor bugger'

TELLING THE KIDS

Fourteen of the women hadn't discussed the possibility of imprisonment with their children because a) they thought it best left to other relations; b) the mother felt that the children were too young to understand; or c) the mother was imprisoned on arrest and therefore was given no opportunity to do so.

Once imprisoned, 15 mothers reported that their children knew where they were and three that the children were too young to be told and understand. One of the remaining two child family groups was not told; and the other was told that the mother was in hospital.

Gloria: I talked to my son afterwards. He was not a very talkative kid. He sort of shut down when I was inside.

Sandra: No, I didn't actually discuss it with them. It just came from conversations that they overheard.....

Pauline: Well, Mum and Dad left it for a weekend then sat her down and told her. She knew...she knew where I was because of my brother...one of my brother's friends is in jail and she knew when I didn't come home where I was because I had never left her.

Of the six mothers who had the chance and did discuss imprisonment with their children, most thought it was difficult but beneficial to their relationship.

Deborah: I said to him that I might have to go away for a little while. ...at first he said 'No, no, no'. He didn't want to know about it. But the night before court I sort of tried to prepare him because I thought 'If I walk tomorrow, I'll be really lucky' ...I said to him 'look, I might have to go away, but if I do, hopefully it won't be for too long a time'. He wasn't happy about the idea, but he gets on well with the person who cared for him.. They all helped to look after him.

DRUGS

There are no official statistics on the number of women who enter prison with a history of regular intravenous drug use.

Currently, of a total population of 240 there are 84 women in the Mulawa and Dawn De Loas Centre on the methadone program.

Of the 20 women interviewed 19 identified that they had a history of drug abuse - 16 primarily of heroin abuse; the three others identifying drugs including cocaine, alcohol and amphetamines.

12 women identified that they had been on a methadone program during imprisonment or since release, and two of these have subsequently have ceased the program. It is of interest to note that the research questions did not inquire into methadone use but each of the methadone users brought it up as a factor affecting the daily care of their children.

One woman reported that, while she was in prison, she was refused D & A counselling due to her being on methadone.

This appeared to be the policy in the women's prison at the time. Likewise several women commented on prison policy not to allow women on methadone to be allowed access to the Norma Parker minimum security facility.

When asked whether their drug use had affected their ability to care for their children 14 said yes. Only two of the heroine-using mums said it didn't affect their care of kids. The woman reported either or both psychological and practical neglect.

Margaret: *It effected my caring for my kids in every way. When you're a drug addict you don't care about anything...only your next shot. I did love them, but it was like they were right at the back of my mind. I couldn't look after them because if I woke up sick...I had no energy. I was very aggro. I never abused my children like hitting them or anything. But I could have got to the stage when I done that. So I ended up letting my mother take care of my kids. They got taken off me anyway because of the drug use. Just in every way, you know. Just in every little way.*

Gloria: *It affected my caring in some ways....abusing a child by emotional starving. Not understanding a child's needs and wants and stuff like that.*

Sue: *Well, I mean I always looked after the kids, but drugs did come first at the end, and I ended up leaving the girls with my mother-in-law, because I was too busy out doing what not...*

Pauline: *I was giving the love, but well obviously they were missing out on something, you know that you can give them when you're straight. I now don't take anything. You can just feel the difference and she (8 year old daughter) knows the difference. She used to be ...with the pills...I was very bad with the pills...she used to be terrified that I would drop dead, or if I was asleep she would come in and wake me and things like that. But now my face is clear, and young as she is, she knows ..and it has made a big effect on her in that respect.*

Beryl: *When it came to like paying the bills, you always put it off till tomorrow because when you were having a shot you would feel such well-being so you would turn around and think well, I'll fix that up tomorrow. That's cool. Then the drug would wear off and you would think "Oh my God" ...but you know towards love for the kids or anything like that, I never took it out on them. They always had everything...always food and stuff. But ...I let the rent slip, I had to catch up on that. But I never took it out on them. If I was hanging out I used to say "It was always self-inflicted. It was not their fault."*

Jenny: *I made sure they were safe, but it did affect the kids because of my irresponsibility and selfishness.*

VISITS

One of the major concerns to women imprisoned is the frequency and quality of visits with their children.

It is important to remember that visiting frequency and types of contact are determined in part by the classification accommodation of the institution in which the women are held.

In NSW there is presently insufficient accommodation in the only C Classification prison. In 1993 although 51.1% of women were classified as C when sentenced, only 21.5% were accommodated in C classification prisons*.

The prisons#

Mulawa Correctional Centre is a maximum security facility intended for the accommodation of A & B classification prisoners and unclassified persons on remand. However the prison is the largest of the three women's prisons accommodating approximately 170 women including A B & C classification prisoners. The visiting area is an undecorated long room with a series of tables joined together. The visitors sit on one side of the table and the prisoners on the other in front of a glass panel behind which the prison officers supervise the visits. There is no play equipment for the children and all visitors must remain seated. If prisoner or visitor has to leave the room, to go to the toilet for example, the visit is terminated. One visit a week is allowed with a minimum time allocated of half an hour, usually longer depending on demands on the visiting area. Mothers can apply for a monthly all-day visit with their children. These visits are carried out either in the visiting area or in an outside area containing one set of basic play equipment but no books or other toys. The all-day visits are on a Monday so children have to take time off school

Dawn De Loas Centre is a medium security prison located next to Mulawa in the grounds of the Silverwater prison complex. It is intended for the accommodation of B & C prisoners. The facility accommodates between 70 and 80 women and visiting is allowed once a week. There are outside and inside visiting areas and the conditions are less restrictive. However during the time covered by this report the Dawn De Loas prisoners were using the Mulawa visiting area.

* Source: NSW Prison Census 1993

These descriptions describe the experience of the mothers surveyed. Some conditions and procedures have changed subsequently; other changes are planned. See p. 4 and Appendix 5.

Norma Parker Centre is a minimum security facility operating from a building that once operated as a children's home at Parramatta. The women there are work-release and therefore only allowed visiting on weekends. Either Saturday or Sunday or both are available for visiting and although adults must leave at lunchtime for the prison "roll call", children can stay and eat with their mothers. The facility accommodates approx 70 C2 and C3 classified prisoners. Women on the methadone program are not eligible to go to the Norma Parker Centre because these women are not eligible for work release.

In all prisons special visits can be applied for and granted at the discretion of the governor.

Sections: Section 29 of the Prisons Act allows prisoners conditional absence from the prison. In the case of 29(2) (c) it allows for mothers to be placed back in the community with their children as long as they remain supervised.

The mother makes application to the Commissioner of Corrective Services through the Mothers and Young Children's Committee. In the eight years from 1984 to 1992 only 46 women were released on 'sections'. On a conservative estimate 1,000 mothers served time in NSW prisons during that period. The number of mothers released on 'sections' was less than 5% of that number.

Quality of visits

Women reported shortened visits, lack of toys and play equipment; and unpredictability of cancelled visiting rights as some of the main impediments to the quality of visiting with their children.

Prisons do not see visits as a visitors right and they can be cancelled without warning if there is a “lock down” because of industrial action, meeting or other reason. The prisons take no responsibility for notifying visitors and several of the women reported that visits with children had been cancelled and the children notified only once they had arrived at the prison.

Gay: *The officers are walking around in their uniforms and the kids just think they're coppers, that's what they look like. You get a bit steamed off...and some of them aren't suited to be out there to supervise, you know they're very, you know when kids are doing something they snap down their throat.*

Di: *Oh it was really hard because I couldn't take him to my room if it was cold, I couldn't take him upstairs, I had to keep him in the demountable and it was filthy in there with a dirty old mattress and the officers made me keep him in there oh once I was allowed to take him upstairs but any other time, I had to keep him downstairs outside and it's too hard for a little baby .*

Pauline: *Visiting was pathetic actually, you know, well the table, is it still the same? One side this, one side that...she (her 7 year old daughter) was petrified, she was petrified. They should have something like the male jails ...they have got plenty of tables where you can sit with your family. You can't even put your hands under the table...the males have got it so easy. ..but I couldn't believe it, when it's "get your hands up", you know, here's your poor child thinking this must be really bad for mum...I ended up saying to mum, because every time they would come out, all they would do was cry, you know I just couldn't play with her...so I ended up saying to mum after the first visit "I'd prefer you not to come out because it upsets me too much". But she still kept coming out and I got better.*

Deborah: *I think probably the worse thing would be the fact that they put the mums into those horrible overalls which they do for all visits..and they do now. I don't know for how long but not for very long, they have at Mulawa, I think it is the first Monday of the month is the full day visit of the children. But I feel they should be more often, I think twice a month. And I think the screws could sort of back off a little bit. You know, sort of give them a bit more space. I mean, I know they have a job to do, but I'm sure the mums are not going to grab the kids and escape on a visit.*

Frequency of visits

Of the women interviewed, 6 saw their children once or not at all; 7 monthly; 4 were visited fortnightly; 2 weekly and one was able to see her baby daily while in police cells on remand.

Of the women surveyed the average visit was 1.1 times a month. There was no correlation between length of sentence served and frequency of visits. Nor was there a correlation between geographical proximity of the carer and children to the prison and frequency of visits. Of interest in the findings is the fact that although 17 of the women's children were in the primary care of a relative, only three of these primary carers were responsible for taking the children to visit the mother in prison.

Some of the reasons identified by the mothers for this were:

- * Geographical position of prison (none of the three prisons is within walking distance of a train station);
- * Age or infirmity of carer;
- * Conflict within the family;
- * Mothers/children found the visit too upsetting

Margaret: I didn't see the boys that often but I saw my daughter once a month after Children of Prisoners arranged it. I was seeing her every month because I had custody of her. I could have a say. I didn't think it was often enough. I was only seeing my daughter once a month cause I was in Reiby. (A wing of Mulawa)...it was once every two weeks in Dawns but over on Mulawa it is not enough... It would be all right if you could see your kids once a week....At first she (daughter) didn't know who I was...she hadn't seen me for three months, and then when she came down she thought I was my sister, because we look alike and talk very much alike, and she was calling me Auntie...And when my son came down he had to explain "No, that's mummy. You remember mummy". I started talking like I used to sing to her of a night ...baby talk...and I started singing so that she might think 'I know that voice' ...and after a couple of months she started coming out of her shell.

Julie: I only saw them once the whole time I was in there and that was just before I got out. And that was the first time I had anything to do with them. I tried ringing them on the phone. My sister wouldn't let me talk to them. I sent letters...They didn't even receive the letters...pictures I sent them to stick on the wall...they didn't receive them. My sister kept them. They wrote me letters but she wouldn't give them envelopes or stamps to send letters...so it wasn't good.

Sandra: *See, not having a car and that, it was too difficult...he (partner) brought the kids out one on one of the weekend visits. But he had to walk from Auburn station to the jail and it was just too long a walk for the kids.*

Sue: *It was four months before I got to see them the first time. I'd arranged an all day visit...and someone was going to drop them off and pick them up at 2.30 in the afternoon. Then I was told that I could only have an hour visit, which was just.....then they went back to the country and then I couldn't see them till I got out (five months later). It was just very.....and they (prison officers) didn't seem to care.*

CUSTODY & CARE

Partners: the missing fathers

Eight of the women were in de facto relationships prior to imprisonment. Each of these male partners were fathers to all or some of the children in the household. However only one woman identified their partner as being the primary carer of the children while the mother was in prison. This same father was the only partner who took responsibility for taking the children to visit their mother in prison and he did so only once.

Only two of these eight relationships survived the imprisonment of the mother.

Two of the partners were arrested at the same time as the mother on the same charge and one subsequently on an unrelated charge.

Families: a mixed blessing

Fifteen of the twenty mothers interviewed placed their children in the care of a female relative. Nine of the child family groups went to grandmothers; five to aunts; and one to a cousin. One other child family group went to live with a single grandfather; and another with a female friend of the mother. Of the remaining three mothers, two had already lost custody of their children and were living in foster care; and the third had placed the children with her male partner, the father of one of the three children.

Some of the female carers (particularly aunts) were working women with no previous experience of full time child-care.

The mothers reported that no support, education or counselling was offered to the carers by outside agencies except Children of Prisoners who assisted with visiting.

These findings open up a wide range of possible interpretations and conjecture. They reflect and advise upon a number of complex issues such as the assumption of instinctive female competence in child rearing; the traditional willingness of females to adopt such roles; the demands placed upon, and the limited resources of, the extended family in our culture; expectation and actuality of male responsibility; and many more. It is not within the scope of this report to examine these issues, some of which are explored in Ann Aungles' excellent recent work, *The Prison and the Home -a study of the relationship between domesticity and penalty*.

What can be argued from the findings, however, is that placing children with a female relative, without support or education, does not guarantee that the imprisoned mother will be satisfied with the care given, or that the post-release experience will be easier for mother or children.

Even though all but two of the twenty mothers said they chose the carer for their children, three implicitly stated that they felt they had no choice, and half the others expressed dissatisfaction at the way the arrangement had worked out. The main areas of dissatisfaction were:

- . the fact that the carer was aged or infirm and therefore child care was a practical burden to them;
- . the fact that the carer had tried to distance or alienate the children from the mother; in two cases actually tried to take legal custody against the mothers will;
- . the fact that the carer had found it difficult, or were unwilling, to allow the mother to re-establish the maternal bond post-release.

Nine of the seventeen mothers who placed their children with a relative while imprisoned stated that they did not receive regular and accurate information about their children's welfare. Five of these nine said that they did not have involvement in decisions relating to their children's lives.

One mother whose children were in the care of their grandmother stated that she was denied information and involvement although she had requested it. Another mother was refused telephone contact with her children by the carer/ aunt. Both these mothers had care of the children before arrest and resumed it post-release.

Julie: (whose children were placed in the care of an aunt) *My brother went to the solicitors and tried to adopt them, to get full adoption of them. No, I didn't really understand. I was scared that someone could take them from me..... When I went to get the kids back I felt that threatened that I even lied to her (aunt). I said they were only going to their dad's for the weekend. I didn't take them back. That's how threatened I felt.*

Margaret: *I didn't really have a choice except to put them with mum....unless to put them in foster care and I didn't want that, because you don't know who your kids are going with....Mum was a bit upset with me at first and she wouldn't allow the kids to come down to visit She said 'no'. She was trying to be hard. ..(she thought) well if I punish her this way she may wake up.*

Sandra: *There were a couple of times when things had happened to the kids that I didn't know about at the time...that I didn't find out about until I got out of jail. (Carer) felt that I had enough on my plate as it was, so decided to tell me once I was home.*

Beryl: *She's (child's grandmother) not being very fair to me. Like the other week she rang up and said that she would give him back to me in the school holidays, and now she's saying 'Oh, you wouldn't be able to afford to look after him. If I was to give him back to you he could end up in a home'. I said 'Why would he end up in a home? I can look after him.*

Louise: *I don't know if she (mother) told me what was happening with the kids. I think a lot of things are kept from you because they think it's not in your interest to know.*

POST RELEASE

Resuming care

4 mothers did not resume care of children after imprisonment and two others resumed care of some/one but not all their children. Of these six women three had lost custody of their children prior to imprisonment. Of the six women who did not resume care of all their children, three served sentences of 28 months or more and the other three had served multiple terms. Two of these mothers have subsequently been re-admitted to jail. None of the mothers who did not resume care had been sentenced for crimes relating to child abuse or neglect.

Of the 4 mothers who have not resumed care of any of their children, 1 child is in foster care and 3 with grandmothers. 3 of these mothers are currently taking action to resume care of their children. One mother stated that she did not understand what she was signing when she gave her mother-in-law custody of the child. She feels she was pressured into the action by a prison officer.

Two of the mothers are not seeking custody of the children. One mother stated that she does not feel capable of taking custody of her children and the other said that she felt that the child's carer could provide better care for the child.

The broken bond

The most common problem identified by the mothers in re-establishing their bond with their children post-release was the results of the separation.

Some mothers reported that their children had bonded with other adults during the imprisonment period, or that the mother and children were no longer familiar to each other; that the children were angry or traumatised by the upheavals in their life; and that they, the mothers, had been affected by prison routine and found the responsibility of child care difficult

Sandra: *A lot of them think that they are going to get out and everything is going to be like it was before and it's not. It doesn't work that way. Things have changed....the kids have changed, and it just doesn't work like that.....my younger daughter was only six weeks old when I went in and there was no time to form a bond. And the other daughter, she doesn't relate to her as a daughter, she relates to her as a mum because all that developed while I was in jail. And I don't think it's good for a seven year old to have an attitude like that. It's not good at all.*

Jessie: *I had lost all my relationships. The father of the kids had made a new life for himself. It puts an end to everything. You have to start again...a new life. My little girl...it was like giving birth to a nine month old baby- the bonding had to be developed all over again.*

Beryl: *I think it's affected my youngest son more because he doesn't understand. Because he says 'You were there for the older boys all their life, but you weren't there for me. Why don't you care about me'. I said "Yeah, I care . It was just unfortunate that things got a little bit out of control and I had to go and pay for what I did. I said 'The only thing I'm sorry for is that you had to suffer'. He turned around and said 'Oh yeah, Oh right. Nan says you'll go back to jail'. I went 'Mate, I have not been back to jail in two years and I'm not going to go back'.*

Di: *I would have been a better mum if I had had him all the time. All I had him was for four months, taking care of him. I got out of jail and was handed this child. 'Here, you're the mother, look after it.' I couldn't handle it....he wasn't mine. He didn't attach to me. I'd put him to sleep and he'd wake up in the middle of the night and want his auntie, not me. I'd have to stand there and watch that and then my sister and I would start fighting.*

Julie: *My son has been so angry with me since I got out. ...I had to tell him to do something. I don't like doing it but he turned around and said 'You can't make me do that'he thinks he can put it over mum, and because I'm not squeaky clean, and he knows that, he says 'You can't preach to me. You can't make me do that' And I said to him: 'Yes I can. Just because I've made some mistakes doesn't mean I'm not mum. I don't want you to make the same mistakes.*

Gloria: *Well, he didn't have the emotions with me, anyway...You could always see the loneliness in his eyes when he'd come and see me and stuff. Just little things he used to do used to cut me up because I knew he was missing me. ...it (the separation) was a killer. When I was inside I couldn't even talk about it without crying about him. It was a mess.*

Gay: *There were too many people telling him what to do....They lose some kind of respect for you because you haven't been there....Not being there, you know. You can't be there to fulfil your duties.The constant ties you have with your child...being a parent is being there for the child. and if you're not there, you can't do it.*

Pauline: *....my mum was going to go up to see the principal because my daughter was in the sick bay nearly every day...she was just not seeing me enough, you know. We were always corresponding by making cards with pictures and she would do the same...it was just that mummy wasn't there, when she wanted, and neither was her daddy.*

Sue: *...like the youngest one, trying to chastise her, you know what I mean, not in a way to be the big monster...and she was upset about birthdays and that she didn't get nothing. She got something little but nothing, you know no party or that.*

Ruth: *All the changes. The children had to change pre-schools, had to move house. The two babies didn't know me. They called my sister 'mum'.*

Kylie: *How do I make it up to the kids? When I was in, my relationship broke downso my kids went from having a mum and a dad to having no-one.*

Most difficult period post release

All of the women interviewed identified that imprisonment had effects on their children and the mother/child relationship post-release. They did however identify the initial period post-release as being a particular time of social shock and re-adjustment.

Sandra: *It would be for the first couple of days. The first couple of days you are kind of oblivious to anything apart from the fact that you are really home, then after that it starts to dawn on you that things have changed and the kids are not quite like they used to be and...its after the elation of getting out of jail wears off that you really start to notice that things are not the same anymore.*

Di: *The first eight weeks were the hardest. Yep. I'll never forget them. Now I'm out I accept it, I accept whatever comes. But back then I was really used to being in jail. In jail I thought I had all the problems in the world. But I didn't. I had them when I got out. That's when I had my problems. And then all I wanted was jail because it was routine for me. But if I had done my time with my son, it would have been much easier. Even getting out.*

Deborah: *I think it would have been (hardest the first few weeks)...if I had been chucked straight out into the community, but it was a good sort of icebreaker to come here (a half-way house) and sort of adjust to being out again. Even though I was only in for a short time, it was still a big shock.....just to have the support that they give us here and to slowly ease my way back in. It has been really good to have that.*

Pauline: *Well the first few months (are the hardest)I reckon. Well the first week was good because you are seeing...you are outside ...and you are seeing your family and the first week or two are great...but after a month it's the day to day things. The kids and what you have to do....*

Julie: *When I first got out I was frightened of everything.....going to the shops, getting on a bus, so many people, so many decisions I had to make all over again. And yet now, a couple of weeks down the track, I am coming up against different pressures still connected to the same sort of circumstances, but different pressures.*

Relocation

Not only did children in the survey lose their primary carer, but also many moved home during their mothers' arrest to post release period. Only 6 of the child family groups stayed in the same suburb, 4 in the same house. 14 moved house more than once, and of these 4 moved three times. 11 of the children were of school age and therefore not only changed their home address but also their schools and were isolated from neighbourhood friends. Two of the mothers specifically stated this relocation as a disadvantage to their children suffered as a result of their imprisonment.

Prejudice

Half of the mothers with school age children felt that their children had been prejudiced against as a result of the mother's imprisonment. The mothers of younger children did not identify prejudice as a problem

Beryl: *People that knew you and were nice to your face, you know like neighbours, then they found out where you were and they would take it out on the older boys. They would say 'Oh, your mother's nothing but a criminal. Your mother's this and your mother's that'. They really gave them a hard time...even made it more hard for them. 'your going to turn out the same as this, you're going to go to jail' . Just because I've been to jail, doesn't mean that they are going to turn around and go to jail.*

Deborah: *But I guess I was lucky. He was just that little bit younger and he was not at school. That was one thing the judge said to me.....he said: 'You know your son's only four now. He probably doesn't really know what is going on' (but that was not really so, because he did) he said 'imagine in a few years time if this had happened, how would he react again. What would the kids at school be saying to him?'*

Sue: *Well see, no one really knows that I've gone to jail. The kids told their friends that mummy was at work or another excuse.*

Julie: *Discriminated against? Yeah. School-wise, yes. Situations like that. Yeah, they do.*

THE MOTHERS' RECOMMENDATIONS

Visits

All the women interviewed commented about the inadequacy of visits with their children within the prison. They identified infrequency of visits; inappropriateness of the visiting area; intrusive presence of custodial staff and lack of play equipment and toys as some of the major problems.

Sandra: I think they should make adjustments to their all day visitssome only see their kids one day a month, and because they have spent so much time without their kids, the pressure it puts on the parent having the kids just for that day is incredible. You wouldn't think it, they all loving seeing their kids but the pressure it puts on them is unbelievable because it is so long between all day visits....And nobody in there gives a shit about it. I mean they don't care. 'oh well, you have your all day visit. Think yourself privileged'. It's not right. And a lot of the girls, when the kids were going home used to break down something shocking. Particularly this one girl...her child was a little baby only a few weeks old and she used to be shattered and that's hard. I used to hate it when my kids left because you can't go with them. There has got to be a better way. I think the way they do it is just terrible. It works for them but it doesn't work for the girls. I don't think they realise that. Sometimes I think even if they did I don't think they really care.

Di: I reckon the jails (visiting areas), Mulawa anyway, should have more arts and crafts and more things to do with children. Show the people who haven't got kids before they decide to have kids to have a look at parenting. It's a good thing to learn. It's always hard.

Sue: Just even if they bring out a few little hula hoops and some little chairs, tables, you know if there were more toys to be found for the days when the kids do come, you know it would be a lot better.

Phone calls

Depending on the facility within which the woman is housed she may be allowed one, two or several phone calls a week. Most women reported that they had tried to contact their children weekly by phone. The phone call is timed and that proved to be a problem with mothers talking to distressed children. Mothers also commented that there was a need for children to be able to contact them by phone when the child wanted too.

Ruth: *The children should be able to ring the jail and talk to their mums when they need to. Kids fret for their mums and just to hear their mother's voice can be comforting. The length of phone calls we make should be longer. You have to hang up when times up and you child might be upset or talking to you.*

Counselling for mums and kids

All the women, in some section of the interview, identified the need for information, assistance and guidance in dealing with the experience of imprisonment. Some mothers specifically commented on the value of parenting courses they had done since release and talked about the need for such courses in prison. They also felt that their children needed assistance in understanding their re-action to a mother's imprisonment.

Pauline: *The prisoners themselves should get more feedback on how your children are going to react and how we are going to react when we get out. And the groups - there should be more counselling, like the government should fund for the counselling for the kids. They get no counselling, but kids like my daughter really needed counselling.*

Julie: *If there is some way, whether a woman with children has been in long or short term, if some sort of preparation could be made for that woman and her children - a week, a fortnight, something. Because it really is scary. They just let you out and that's it. You are out the gate. 'Bye. See you later'. And it really is frightening. You get conditioned in that place mentally and physically, and then they just open the gate and let you out. Within the last week, I was frightened. I didn't want to go out, and several times since I've been out I have said that I wish I was back in there because it's just getting too much.*

Beryl: *If someone could have gone around and spoke to them (children) and said that if you're having problems or whatever just ring us up and we'll see what we can do and that. Even just that factor, you know. Like somebody calling around and keeping an eye on them, to see what they were doing.*

Support for carers on the outside:

Several of the mothers felt concern for the outside carer-usually a female relative. They identified age or infirmity or conflicting career demands as some of the difficulties faced by these carers in handling the demands of sudden, full-time child care.

Natasha: *Couldn't there be some way to support the person looking after the kids on the outside? I mean my mum's in her 70's and it was hard on her.*

Margaret: *My father was working. My mother -well she's not well enough to drag them down on the train (for prison visits), and I didn't expect her to. I put myself there.*

Relocation for mums

Three of the mothers identified that geographical distance from their children was an insurmountable problem. Their children had gone to a carer who lived in a different state and they questioned whether it was possible for mothers to be imprisoned in facilities in those states.

Ruth: *When mothers are sentenced, where the kids are should be considered when placing the mother so the kids can come and see them.*

Availability of information within prisons:

One of the most frequent observations made by the women was that they were given no information while in prison about the procedures available to give special consideration to mothers such as sections or special visits. They commonly learnt about these matters from fellow inmate mothers.

Clare: *When you are in cells and whatever if you can know the rights that you have to have a visitor and stuff like that, if that's possible. That's really important because you are sitting there and you're thinking 'what's happening to my child' and 'what's going on'. That's what your mind is occupied with...you know what I mean?*

Jessie: *Nothing is brought to your attention when you are first in jail. You have to find out what and how for yourself. You are not seen as a mother, but only as an inmate.*

Alternatives to imprisonment including mums and babies units:

Surprisingly, only three of the mothers suggested that they had not done wrong, or made mistakes. However many commented on the fact that alternatives were not seriously contemplated during their sentencing. In some cases it was not even brought to the courts attention that the accused was a mother.

Margaret: *I don't think it's OK to have their mothers taken away from them the way they do today. If you could have mothers and babies in jail especially the young ones. Even the older ones. It doesn't matter what age a child is, it still should be able to be with its mother.*

Di: *It would have been better for him to have with me . I think I would have been a better mother now because I would have had him all that time.*

Deborah: *I really think they should look at their cannabis laws...I mean we are talking about dragging women away from their children, but I mean there's a fine line. You can't say 'Because she's a parent you can't put her in jail', you have to look at what they've done, the offence they've committed. But I think it was silly to put me in jail first of all for smoking pot and then for possession....they should look at the laws and the situation the mother's in and the children and if there are alternatives, which there are....there's community service and there's fines and periodic detention which is a whole lot better than full-time jail anyway, and you know, take everything into consideration when they're separating a family like that.*

Buy ups:

Three of the mothers identified inability to buy their children gifts as a frustration for them.

Natasha: *Why can't we have things on the buy up list for the kids and then we could buy them and we would have something to give the kids as presents for birthdays and things like that.*

Immediate post-release support

Several mothers commented on the difficulties in facing re-adjustment to the outside world.

Beryl: *if the support was there when you first got out.....instead ofyou receive your cheque and off you go, and you're standing there. The first thing you look for is your old friends, and that's when you get into trouble again....but if they had a place to go to straight from prison, most of us would be staying at the place and settling down and trying to get our lives back together...*

LITERATURE REVIEW

Until the last two decades there has been little analysis of women in prison and almost no interest in children of prisoners. The material that has been written in the last twenty years has tended to focus on the experience of male prisoners' families. This has usually examined issues of economic hardship and marital stress, rather than parent /child relationships. (Ferrano, Johnson 1983; Pueschel, Moglia 1971; Dean 1988; Connell 1981; Kemp 1981).

Some researchers and writers have taken up the challenge of examining the experience of women prisoners and the sexualisation of female criminality. Feminists have even attempted to explode the notion of female prisoners being directly connected with assumptions of bad mothering and stereotypical imagery of promiscuity. There has been some recognition in recent years of women's experience in prison and the disadvantaged position they hold within the criminal justice system.

Four books published in the last three years directly deal with women and imprisonment*. Blanche Hampton (1993), herself an ex-inmate describes personally women's experience within the prison system; Patricia Eastaerl (1992) examines the position of overseas-born women in Australian prisons; Mary Eaton (1993) explores women's experience post-release; and Ann Aungles (1994) reveals the other side of the effects of imprisonment for women- the effects on the carers at home. These four women's work have greatly added to our recognition of the experience of women in the criminal justice system.

Since 1978 three major reports have been commissioned on the experience of the children of prisoners: the Nagel Report (1978); Children of Imprisoned Parents Report (1982); and Women in Prison Task Force Report (1985).

All these reports made recommendations for policy change. Few of these recommendations have been implemented.

*See Further reading Appendix 5

APPENDICES

1. The questions
2. Sample profile graphs
3. Testing the sample group - a comparative statistical analysis
4. Women's Action Plan - an outline of the recommendations relating to mothers
5. Further reading

THE QUESTIONS

Section A

About you

What is your age?

What is your marital status?

Did this alter during your imprisonment? If so, how?

What suburb did you live in pre-imprisonment?

What type of accommodation was it?

Did you own your own home/ rent it/ share with others?

What suburb do you live in now?

What type of accommodation is it?

Do you own your own home/ rent it/ share with others?

What level of education have you reached?

Directly before imprisonment were you in paid employment/
unemployed/home duties/ other?

If in paid employment, what was your position?

Did you receive social security payments? If so, what type?

Are you now in paid employment/ unemployed/ home duties/ other?

If in paid employment, what is your position?

Have you received social security payments since release? If so what
type?

Are you Aboriginal/ Torres Strait Islander. Do you come from a non-
English speaking background?

If born overseas, where were you born?

Do you have a disability or illness?

Does this impact on your life as a mother?

Do you have a history of drug or alcohol abuse?

What type of substance and amount of use?

Did or does this affect your role as a parent? If so, how?

Do you own your own car, house or other item which you think is an
asset?

Do you have any debts which you consider significant?

What was the date of your imprisonment? If more than one, the most
recent.

What was the date of your release?

Were you remanded in custody, if so for how long?

What offence were you charged with?

Do you feel that the offence you were charged with had any direct
relationship to you being a parent?

Did you give birth to any child while you were imprisoned?

Did you feel you had someone to support you while you were in prison?

Did you feel you had someone to support you when you were released.

Section B

About your children

How many children do you have?
What ages and gender are they?
Do they have any disability or illness?

Section C

You and your children pre-imprisonment

Did the children live with you before you went to prison?

If yes section (1), if not section (2)

(1)

Did anyone else share accommodation with you and the children? If so what relationship did they have to the children?

What support, if any, in caring for your children - include financial; practical; emotional etc; from government and non-government organisations; family members; partner etc?

How would describe the relationship you had with your children during this period?

(2)

What contact did you have with your children pre-imprisonment? If imprisoned more than once, then give information on each time?

Was this arrangement your choice or was it imposed? If so, by whom...court order etc.?

Section D

About your arrest

What impact did being arrested have on you and your children?

Were the children present/ did they have knowledge of your arrest?

What impact do you think the pre-sentence period had on your relationship with your children, if any?

Did you discuss the possibility of imprisonment with your children?

Section E

You and your children during imprisonment

- Did your children know where you were and why?
- What contact did you have with your children during imprisonment - visits; letters; day leave; how often?
- What was the quality of that contact?
- Who assisted with the contact - transported the children; visited with the children; wrote and sent the children's letters etc?
- Were you satisfied with this arrangement?
- Where did the children live during your imprisonment?
- If not with a relative or friend, were they in substitute care? If so, what type of care and with what organisation or department?
- Did you understand your rights as a parent involved in this arrangement?
- Did you choose this arrangement or was it imposed?
- Was it an informal arrangement or was it a legal agreement?
- Who was the children's primary carer?
- What was your relationship with this person?
- Did you have involvement in decisions relating to your children's life while you were imprisoned?
- Did you receive regular and accurate information about your children's welfare?
- Did your children receive accurate and regular information about you?
- Did you gain any support or assistance while imprisoned in your role as a mum - programs undertaken, special visits?

Section F

You and your children post-release

- Did you expect to resume care of your children post-release?
- Did you resume care? If no, section (1), if yes, section (2)

(1)

If not, why not?

Who now cares for the children?

Are you satisfied with this arrangement?

If not, did you take any steps to change it?

Were you aware of what action could be taken?

Do you expect to take action in the future?

What contact, if any, do you have with your children?

Do you have involvement in decisions relating to your child's life?

Do you receive regular and accurate information about your children's welfare?

What support are you getting in your role as mother?

(2)

Since you resumed care, are you satisfied with this arrangement? If Yes, why? If not, why not?

Did you feel there were satisfactory alternatives?

Are you now or have you received support from an organisation or professional body? If so, what support and when?

Do you receive any support from partner/family and friends?

What changes would you make that would improve imprisoned parents experience?

Section G

General questions

How do you think your time in prison affected your relationship with your children?

Were there any positive consequences for you and your children? If so, what were they?

Do you think your children have been disadvantaged or discriminated against because you have been in prison? If so, how?

What do you think are/ were your children's biggest problems in dealing with your imprisonment and post-imprisonment period?

Do you think that anything could have done to assist the children to overcome these problems?

What do you see as the biggest problems in fulfilling your role as a parent, during and post-imprisonment?

Do you think that anything could have been done to overcome those problems ?

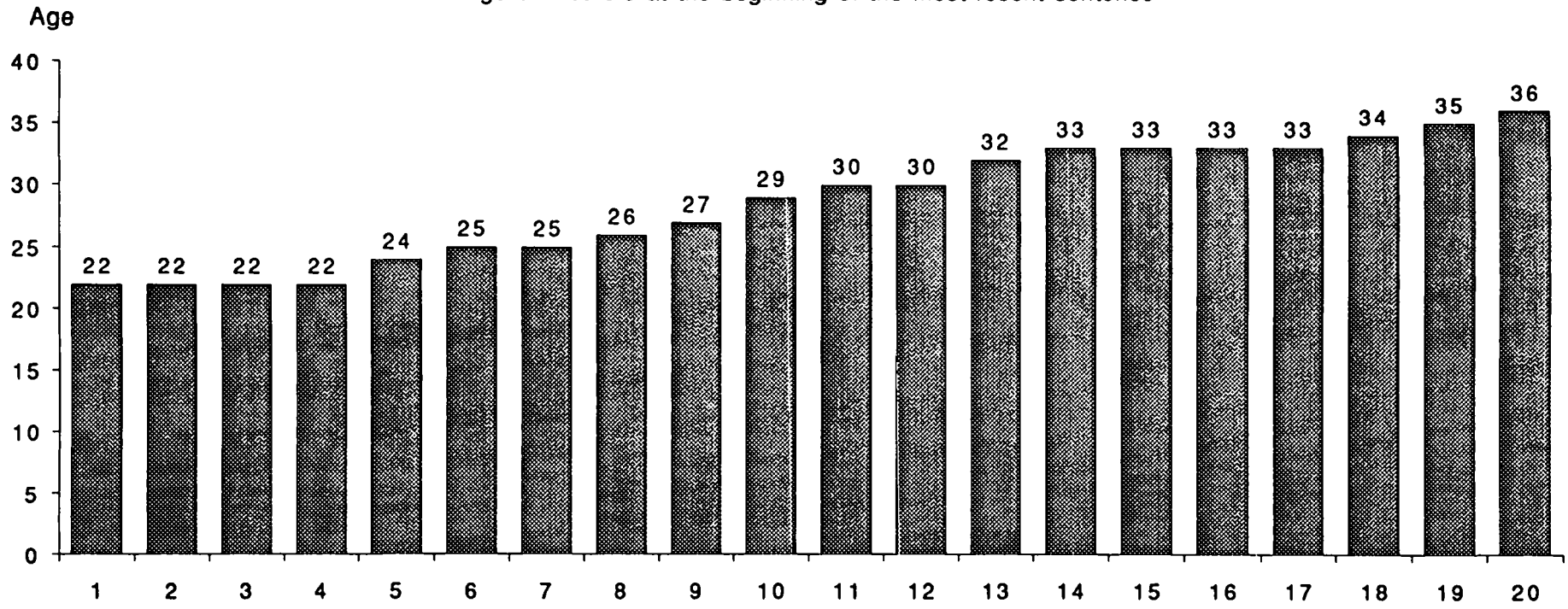
Have there been specific periods post-imprisonment which have been more difficult than others - initial period after release; six months; twelve months?

If you have been able to maintain a relationship with your children, what do you think has been the most significant factors in assisting you and your children to maintain that relationship?

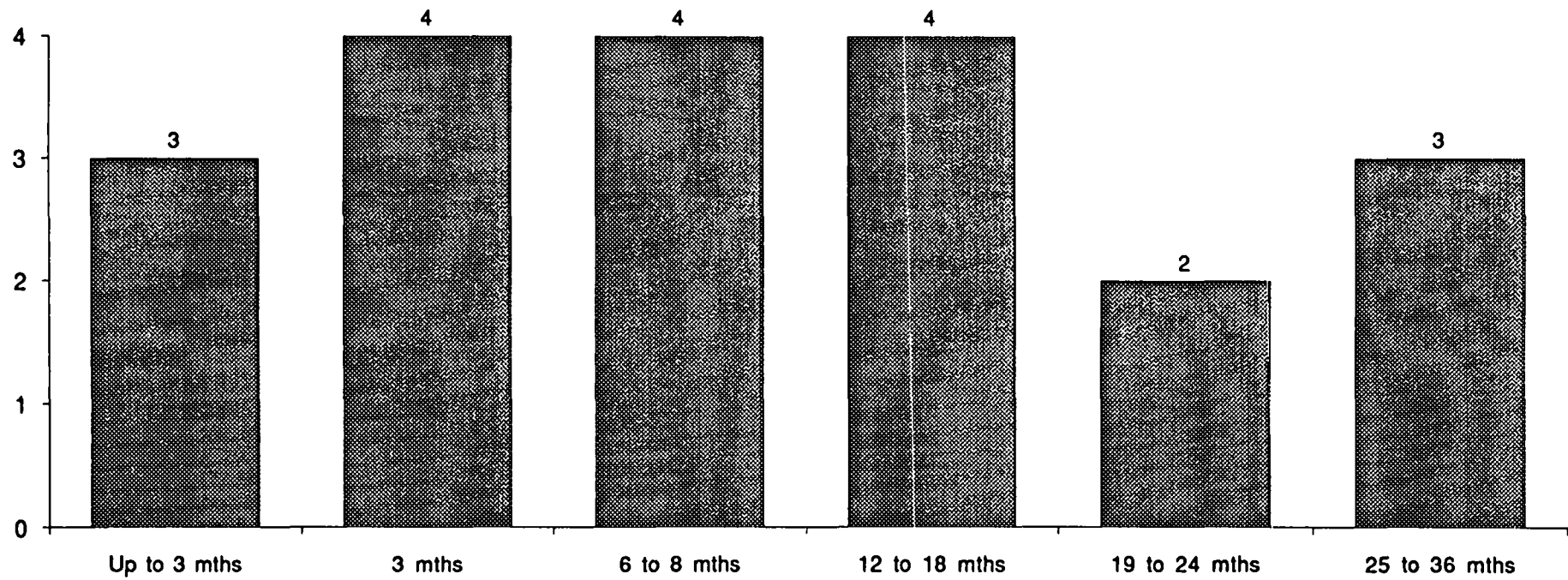
If you have been unable to maintain a relationship with your children, what do you think has been the most significant factors in severing the relationship?

Would you like to add any further information or comment?

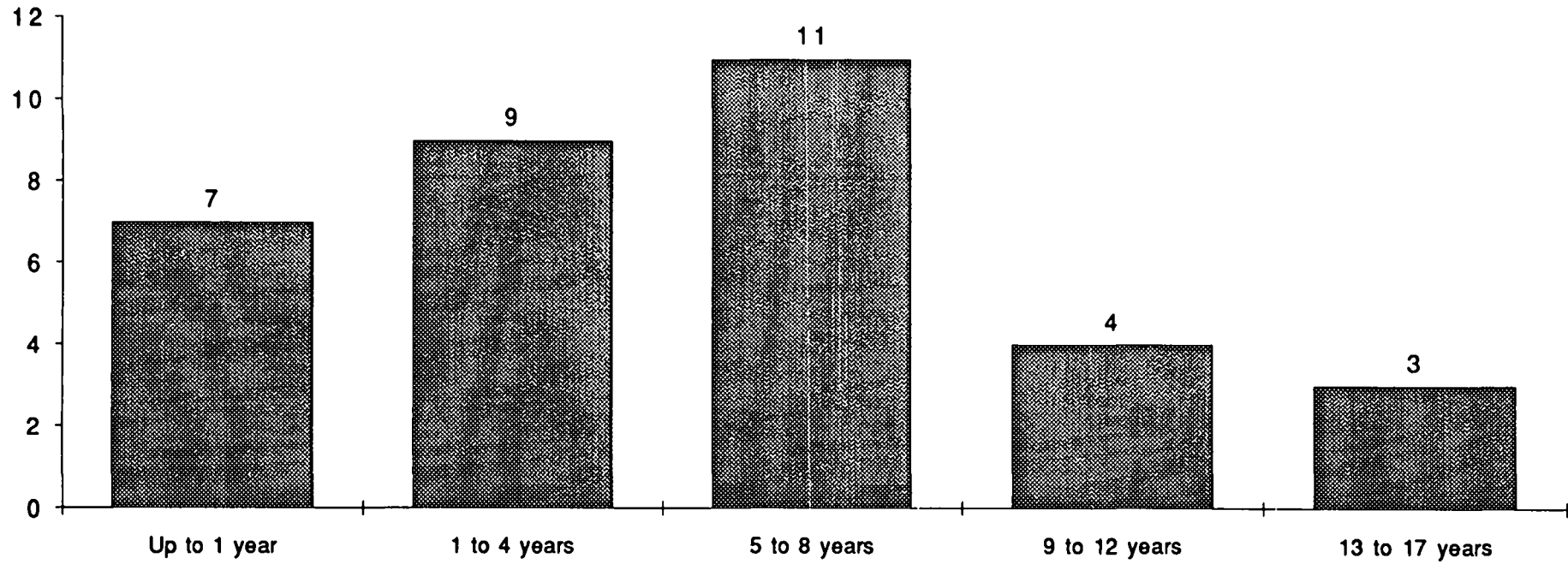
Age of mothers at the beginning of the most recent sentence



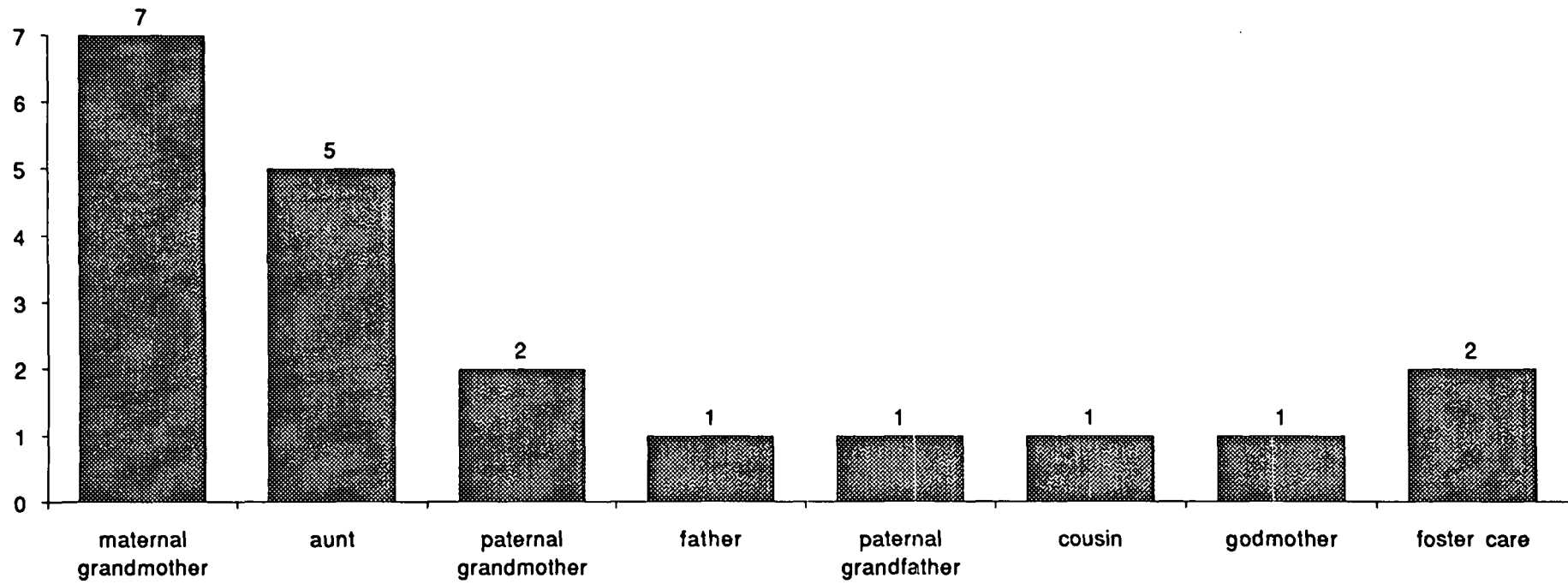
Numbers of mothers grouped by length of time served in months



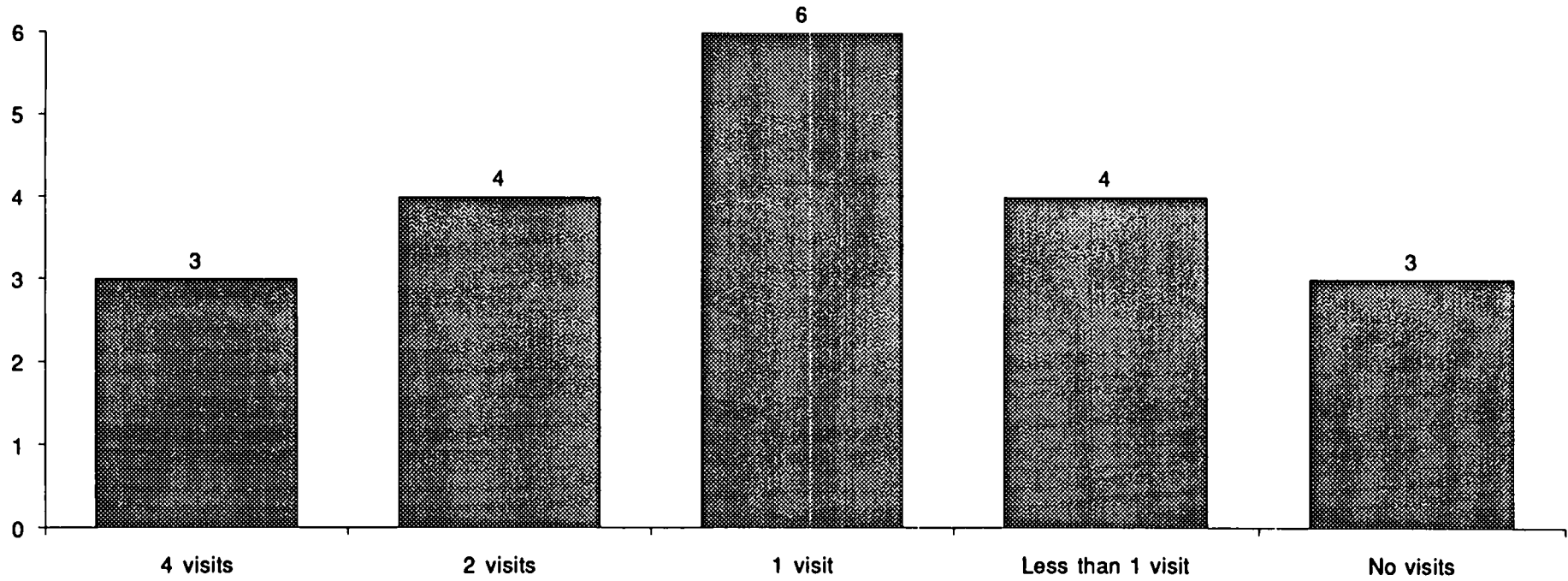
Numbers of children at the time of the most recent sentence, grouped by age



Numbers of mothers, grouped by relation of primary carer to children during mothers' imprisonment



Number of mothers, grouped by children's visits per month



**Testing the sample group:
a comparative statistical analysis**

	Official Statistics	Report Statistics
Age at start of sentence §		
18-20	8.0%	0%
21- 24	27.0%	20%
25-29	29.0%	35%
30-34	14.0%	35%
35-39	12.0%	10%
40 +	9.5%	0%
Average Age at start of sentence	28.7 years	28.05 years
Percentage of inmates by crimes*		
assault	4.7%	5%
robbery with assault	5.5%	15%
robbery incl steal	30.7%	35%
drugs	16.9%	10%
fraud	16.6%	5%
other	25.6%	30%
Min time to serve*		
Up to 2 months	25%	15%
2 -4 months	24%	20%
4 -6 months	11%	15%
6-9 months	19%	5%
9-12 months	7%	0%
1-2 years	8%	30%
2-3 years	4%	15%
over 3 years	3%	0%
Aboriginals in prison pop*	13.1%	10%
No of prisoners with known prior imprisonment*	49.2%	70%

* Source: NSW Prison Census 1993

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics -Social Indicators 1992

§ Source: Women's Action Plan

Appendix 4.

Department of Corrective Services-Women's Action Plan (January 1994)

An outline of the recommendations directly relating to mothers

Mothers and Children in Correctional Centres - Recommendations p.65

1. The Department adopt the principle that facilities and programs be provided in correctional centres to cater for selected inmate mothers who wish to live with and care for their pre-school age children.
2. That component of the 1993-2003 Ten Year Capital Works Plan relating to facilities for women, take into account the need for mothers and children's accommodation in a range of facilities.
3. That a small working group be established to develop the implementation policy of a mothers and children's program. This group would be co-ordinated by the Director, Women's Services.

Section 29 (2) (c) Recommendations p.69

1. Clearer and more timely information should be provided to pregnant women and primary carers when they are received at a correctional centre concerning the role of the Mothers and Young Children's Committee and the procedure for submitting applications.
2. Approval for Section 29 (2) (c) recommendations be fast-tracked particularly in the case of women in the later stage of pregnancy.
3. A greater level of measured risk management be encouraged so that more inmate mothers can serve the balance of their sentence in the community.
4. Make maximum use of Transitional Centres to be developed by the Department for inmate mothers and their children.

Visiting conditions for women inmates - recommendations p.74

1. That the recommendations in Appendix 5 (of the Women's Action Plan) be implemented to deal with visits policy in the short term.
2. That the Women's Services Unit, in conjunction with the Department's Operation Branch review the security and economic value of requiring certain female inmates to wear sealed overalls during visits and explore alternative strategies.
3. That inmates be more involved in determining and arranging their own visits.
4. That when public holidays interfere with all day visits for inmate mothers alternative arrangements be introduced so that the school age children be not disadvantaged.

Further reading

Books

- Aungles, Ann *The Prison and the Home*
The Institute of Criminology Monograph Series, No 5
Sydney; 1994
- Baunach, Phyllis J *Mothers in Prison*
Transaction Books, New Brunswick; 1985
- Eaton, Mary *Women After Prison*
Open University Press, Buckingham; 1993
- Hampton, Blanche *Prisons and Women*
NSW University Press, Sydney; 1993
- Easteal, Patricia W *The Forgotten Few: Overseas-Born Women in
Australian Prisons*
Australian Government Printing Service, ACT; 1992

Reports

- Children of Imprisoned Parents*
The Family & Childrens Services Agency,
Ministry of Youth & Community Services of NSW; March 1982
- Infants in Prison in Western Australia*
An evaluation study by J.F. Hartz-Karp
for the W.A. Department of Corrections; December 1981
- Women In Prison*
Report of the NSW Task Force on Women In Prison
To the Minister for Corrective Services; March 1985
- Mothers & Young Children in Custody in NSW*
Custodial Services Division; March 1988

Strategies

- Women's Action Plan*
A three year strategy for female inmates in NSW correctional facilities
Planning Unit-Department of Corrective Services, January 1994
- Emu Plains Correctional Centre -Redevelopment for Women
Value Management Study*
Product Evaluation Unit-Public Works; March 1994

Seminar papers

*Children of Prisoners & Their Outside Carers:
The Invisible Population*

Ann Aungles & Gloria Larman

Paper presented at the Women and the Law Conference; 1993

Maternal-Infant Incarceration

Sociological & psychological perspectives

Suzanne E. Hatty, Ph.D. Institute of Criminology

Paper presented at the Women in Prison Seminar; June 1984

Articles

- Aldrige, Shirley 'The Children of Women Prisoners'
in: *Health Issues*; March 1989
- Black, Dora 'Children of Parents in Prison'
in: *Archives of Disease in Childhood*; 1992
- Bloom, Barbara 'Mothers in Prison'
in: *Nurturing Today*; Vol X, No.1
- Bloom, Barbara 'Why Punish the Children'
in: *IARCA Journal*; June 1993
- Clement, Mary J 'Parenting in Prison'
in: *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*; Vol.19;1993
- Karten, Susan M 'Who's Watching the Kids'
in: *Justinian*; March 14, 1980
- Sametz, Lynn 'Children of Incarcerated Women'
in: *Social Work*; July 1980