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Research
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Maternal Imprisonment: The impact on maternal role, emotions and identity

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Everywhere.....



Judgement ...



Neglect

Missed and Lost Opportunities.....

- My mum was a prostitute, my dad was an alcoholic.. I was invisible...(Diane)
- What chance did I have, there was no point asking for help...it wasn't there...(Dee)
- My mam had a shit mam, she was a shit mam, and now I'm a shit mam (Mary)
- I left home at 14, I tried to leave the past behind .. The only I could cope was off my head (Shanice)
- If I'd got help sooner I know I wouldn't have gone to prison .. And it wasn't for the want of asking (Naomi)
- I was scared to ask for help .. Scared they'd take my kids, they'd think I was a bad mother...so I tried, I really tried to manage on my own ... I just couldn't though (Carla)
- They'd already made their minds up.. they took them then I had nothing, I was nothing , what was the point of me (Emma)
 - *They, the SS I like to call them, kept talking about all these risk factors being part of their assessment – apparently the fact I was raped and abused by a sick bastard is a risk factor for me being able to be a good enough Mother... how the fuck that can be right?... none of it was my fault what happened to me and was directly related to why I lost my way and went to prison... so instead of helping me, they punish me through my kids and tell me I can't be trusted to look after my kids... and apparently 'getting myself locked up' proved that to them!... I honestly wanted to scream...WELL FUCKING HELP ME, THEN!"* (Carla)
 - Once my kids were taken I had nothing to go straight for ..nothing mattered. I didn't matter (Sian)
 - They said they'd help me to keep her. But when I saw them come onto the ward with the car seat... and I knew (Emma)

Guilt is a life-threatening emotion

Mothers spoke of not being able to 'settle' (Sophie), 'think straight' (Cynthia), 'concentrate on anything' (Karen), 'sleep' (Annie), or 'eat' (Sophie), until they had seen or at least been in contact with their children.

When they took the kids they (the 'professionals') all disappeared – I was alone really alone – topping myself seemed the only way to escape the guilt... I don't know how to survive outside of here now (prison) (Sandra)

"Going to prison as a mother is I think the worst thing... I genuinely can't think of anything worse as a mother to do to your children... (Jaspreet)

"I was supposed to get a reception phone call, but I didn't get it because there was so many of us on the prison transport that day. I was literally going crazy crazy crazy. It was driving me mad not even knowing she was safe. It was hours and hours before I finally got an officer to check for me that she was safe. I genuinely thought I would have a heart attack from the stress." (Annie)

'I'm totally broken, [...]. I'm literally dead inside,[...] the mere fact my own children don't recognise me has torn me apart...[...] I've lost everything'. (Taranpreet)

I literally just wanted to die, I felt like I couldn't live not now not apart not without them ...I just couldn't see it being possible (Tia)

'for the first time in my life I considered self-harm for no other reason than I had no idea how to handle the pain.'
(Rita)

Renegotiating Motherhood.....

"It wasn't like life was rosy before prison, but I thought it would be all alright once I was out and back with them, it didn't occur to me I'd spend hours of days just re-living being apart from them. I'll be sitting watching TV then all of a sudden I'll be thinking about when she was leaving after visiting, or when they said to take me down in court and I knew I wouldn't see them that night. It just haunts me, and the weird thing is in some ways it stops me enjoying being with them now... because I can't stop thinking about not being able to see them... crazy." (Shanice)

"Literally every day when my daughter goes to school I see the panic in her face in case I'm not here when she gets in... every day I'm reminded of what it was like being without her." (Margot)

"...honestly, I was mentally scarred by having Dwayne in prison... I used to obsess over it. It was stupid but I couldn't put it behind me... so I drank to cope but that just made things worse and I ended up back in again... its crazy, I know... it doesn't make sense, but it was all part of the same thing." (Tanisha)

"Sometimes I just torture myself with the 'what ifs'... what if he'd died when I was still inside... then that makes me think what if my kids had got run over... or my husband died, and they had no one... I drive myself mad with what ifs." (Maggie)

"I was high alert all the time [when out], I can't keep weight on me anymore and I'm sure it is nervous energy. I just feel so ashamed of being a mum who has been to prison, but honestly living with it is literally exhausting." (Karen)

"There are so many situations where I have to tell white lies to cover up for that period I was away. Just the other day my granddaughter asked me what I did for my 21st, well it was a kick to the stomach because I was away for my 21st. I just feel so guilty for lying but I'm too ashamed for them to know. Imagine telling them their granny was a common criminal." (Margaret)

"The memory of them coming in the hospital with the car-seat, I had thought I was taking her home, but as soon as I saw that car-seat I knew they were taking her. I remember hearing someone screaming and screaming and then I realised it was me screaming. I discharged myself from hospital and went and got off my face. I didn't know what else to do." (Emma)

EMMA

My baby was born in prison – how can I tell her that – shes 10 and she still doesn't know – shell hate me when she does find ou (Kady)

This book came about primarily because of a woman, in a prison I (Lucy) met during my work in prison. As I was leaving, the mother thrust her heart-rending poem 'Drifting Away' into my hand and said to me,

'Please read this, for me and my child, please read this and show someone in government who makes the decisions that mean we get sent here, make them see the harm it causes'.

Drifting Away

I was taken without warning, no time to prepare me, to prepare you
Wrenched screaming from court, you not knowing, blissfully unaware
You're staying with friends, taken in, in pity, the outsider
We connect after days of mutual torture, fast words, anger, recrimination, loss
Pain
You hate me, I love you, a few short months, I'm sorry, driven by desperation
Every day, I heard your pain, you were adrift, untethered, a boat with no anchor
Drifting further away
The day came and went, no call, no you, where were you, the late-night knock on
my door?
You were 'missing', they didn't want to worry me, they found you
In the woods, you left a note, it was too much, you are sorry, you felt lost
You drifted away
I'm still here, now I'm lost, I'm drifting too, I never want to leave
I don't want to be in the world outside, not without you
But I will. I owe you... to live my life and yours—and to live it well
No more drifting, but anchors, a mooring, a safe crossing
In your honour.

Danielle, a mum in prison at t

Drifting AwayPoem given to me by a mum in prison

in Baldwin and Raikes (2019) *Seen and Heard: 100 poems by parents and children affected by parental imprisonment*. Waterside Press.

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<https://www.watersidepress.co.uk/acatalog/Seen-Heard-Poems-Prisons-9781909976429.html>

The Last Word

It was awful, it was shit, it hurt, and I'm scarred, my life was chaotic and complicated before prison. My life as a mother in prison was broken. I've experienced more abuse in my life than most people do in a lifetime. I was an addict; I suffer from nightmares and trauma and depression. All of that is true, but don't just call me complex, don't just call me vulnerable. I'm strong but I want to be stronger. I'm free but I want to be freer. I've moved on but I want to go further. I want society and services to support me not just label me, I want people to help me create chances for others not just give one to me, I don't want to be held back I want to be driven forwards. (Dee).

a mother who had 'good' support! - eventually — after 10 sentences and some of her children lost to care



What Can I do ?

1. Commit to asking about motherhood and what it means in your work/role with women

2. Write a pledge to you and to mothers right now about something you will take away/or do in your future practice

**3. Be aware/be proactive/
challenge/join campaigns**

Thank you for listening

Please feel free to contact me with questions/comments, or requests for copies of publications.

An executive summary of this underpinning research is available on request, which includes my recommendations and a summary of findings.

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