

NICCO: Integrating children of offenders into university courses



‘No-one tells you who to talk to or where to go’

7%

of children experience the imprisonment of a father during their time at school

Find out how to support offenders’ children and their families

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www.nicco.org.uk

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Who are we?

The National Information Centre on Children of Offenders – NICCO (formerly i-HOP) is a service that supports professionals to work effectively with offenders' children and families. NICCO collates and promotes examples of services, interventions, resources, policy and research around this vulnerable group.

Barnardo's was originally commissioned by the **Department for Education** in 2013 to develop this service as an online information hub with a focus on England (www.nicco.org.uk). The service is targeted at all professionals who come into contact with offenders' children and their families, from various sectors including education, health and social care as well as the criminal justice system.

* Department for Education and Skills (2003), *Every Child Matters*, London: The Stationery Office

** Jones, A., Gallagher, B., Manby, M., Robertson, O., Schützwohl, M., Berman, A., Hirschfield, A., Ayre, L., Urban, M. and Sharratt, K. (2013) *Children of Prisoners: Interventions and mitigations to strengthen mental health*. Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield. ISBN 9781862181168

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Children of offenders

“We was there when he got locked up.”

7 year old girl

It is estimated that there are **200,000 children a year** that experience the imprisonment of a parent. Research increasingly shows the impact that parental imprisonment can have on these children – **poorer outcomes, stigma, isolation, health and financial difficulties.**

- **25% of prisoner’s children** are at a higher risk of **poor mental health**²
- **Seven percent of children** will see their father go to prison during their school years³
- Children of prisoners have **twice the risk of anti-social behaviour**⁴

An ‘invisible group’

“There is still stigma...People would think that everybody in the family [is] like that.” Mother

Currently there is **no routine identification** by local authorities, prisons, police or children’s services of which children are affected by parental offending. There is not statutory training in these sectors regarding the impact of offending on families. The **stigma and bullying** that these families often face can mean that children and parents do not want to let professionals and agencies know they are facing these particular challenges.

Given this, these children and families can often be left feeling **isolated** and with a **lack of support.**

The need for professionals to understand and respond to the needs of children of offenders

“...there is a duty of care and a duty to provide these children with the same opportunities for success as everyone else” Social Care Institute for Excellence

As some of this group of children and families will be amongst the most vulnerable, **it is a priority to include children of offenders in workforce training and university courses.** The children’s workforce has a responsibility to both promote the welfare of children and also ensure that all children are provided with the opportunity to achieve the best possible outcomes (as set out in the Children’s Act 2004 and Every Child Matters 2003).

Furthermore there is an **emerging national, strategic recognition** that the needs of this group of children and families should be recognised and responded to by professionals. In 2013 the Department for Education funded NICCO, for all professionals working with children and families of offenders. Ofsted in April 2013 identified children of offenders as a target group for Children’s Centres with needs requiring additional support.⁵ At an international level, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have a right to maintain contact with their parents where the state has separated them, if it is in the child’s best interests.⁶

Children’s workforce training already has a focus on the **principles and values that underpin work with children and families** including respect, non-judgemental practice, inclusiveness and accessibility to services. These principles and values are of particular significance concerning children of offenders, who experience stigma and discrimination often as a result of a lack of understanding about the impact of imprisonment on the families left behind. It is vital for professionals to have an awareness of the impact of parental offending, and the ability to **respond with confidence** to the associated needs and challenges – in order to provide a non-judgmental, confidential place for families to disclose information.

NICCO – providing knowledge and information for the children’s workforce

“...we [will] work with a child with a parent in prison. Having an understanding of this will help us support the child...as we are aware of what they might be going through.”

Early childhood student, University of West England

NICCO can **support academic institutions to include children and families affected by parental imprisonment** in courses such as PGCE and Undergraduate ITE, Social Work, Childhood Studies, Criminology, Counselling, Youth Work, Child Nursing and Education Studies. Children of offenders could feature in modules that look at a range of topics, including inclusive practice, children’s rights, the criminal justice system, multi-agency working and child wellbeing and resilience.

NICCO can provide a **FREE comprehensive pack of materials** that can be integrated into relevant courses or modules to raise awareness about the impact of parental offending and the type of support that different services can provide. The pack includes:

- a comprehensive, up to date reading list
- links to e-learning tools and multimedia resources
- case studies from various services (including schools, social care and criminal justice)
- a PowerPoint presentation about the impact of parental imprisonment
- activities with teaching notes to prompt discussion and debate

In addition, the NICCO site itself provides a valuable resource for students to further their learning and research, and includes:

- **over 160 pieces of quality assessed research** into the impact of imprisonment on children and families
- **national policy** guidelines and existing **local protocols and strategies**
- **guidelines, toolkits and training materials** for professional practice development
- **resources** for professionals to use with children and families
- details of local and national **services** that work specifically with children and families of offenders
- **practice models** and **case studies** of existing work around the country

Please contact us directly if you would like NICCO to share our academic materials or provide a guest lecture: nicco@barnardos.org.uk

Note:

Children's and parents' quotes are taken from interviews with children and families in two Barnardo's reports:

Owen Gill, *Every night you cry: Case studies of 15 Bristol families with a father in prison*, Barnardo's, 2009

Owen Gill and May Jacobson Deegan, *Working with children with a parent in prison: Messages for practice from two Barnardo's pilot services*, Barnardo's 2013

References:

- 1 Williams K, Papadopoulou V and Booth N, *Prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds: Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners*, Ministry of Justice, March 2012
- 2 Jones et al, *COPING: Children of Prisoners, Interventions & Mitigations to Strengthen Mental Health*, University of Huddersfield, 2013
- 3 Department for Education and Skills, *Every Child Matters*, London: The Stationery Office, 2003
- 4 Joseph Murray, David P. Farrington, Ivana Sekol, Rikke F. Olsen (2009), *Effects of parental imprisonment on child antisocial behaviour and mental health: a systematic review*, Campbell Systematic Reviews 2009:4
- 5 Ofsted, *Children's centre inspection handbook for inspections from April 2013*, March 2013
- 6 United Nations, *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 1989

Examples of existing practice

Barnardo's have produced "**Children affected by the imprisonment of a family member: A handbook for schools developing good practice**". This is a practical resource to support school staff to better respond to the needs of this group of children. It contains information about the effects of imprisonment, strategies that can be used by individual staff to effectively provide support and ideas for whole-school working.

Children's centres in Bristol all have a nominated '**champion for children of offenders**'. The champion is knowledgeable about the impact of parental offending or imprisonment on children and their families and has an understanding about what their needs may be and how their children's centre can effectively respond to them. All of the city's champions attend a meeting each school term to share updates and practice, and further develop their understanding through presentations and workshops from other agencies.



Visit NICCO

Visit www.nicco.org.uk to discover research, resources, policy and more that will support your students to explore the effects of parental imprisonment and related social policy. Sign up to become a member to receive free regular e-newsletters.



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