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The Impact of Parental Imprisonment on Children: Factors Influencing Resilience

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Invisible Children

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Every year,
200,000 children
affected by parental
imprisonment

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Mothers in Prison

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- 54% of prisoners have dependent children aged under 18
- Male and female prisoners equally likely to have children
- **BUT** women twice as likely to report problems concerning children and families
- Women more likely than men to live alone with children before imprisonment (58% vs. 43%)

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Caregiving Arrangements

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Children with a father in prison:

94% live with mother/stepmother
5% other family members
1% in care

Children with a mother in prison:

27% live with father/stepfather
69% other family members
4% in care

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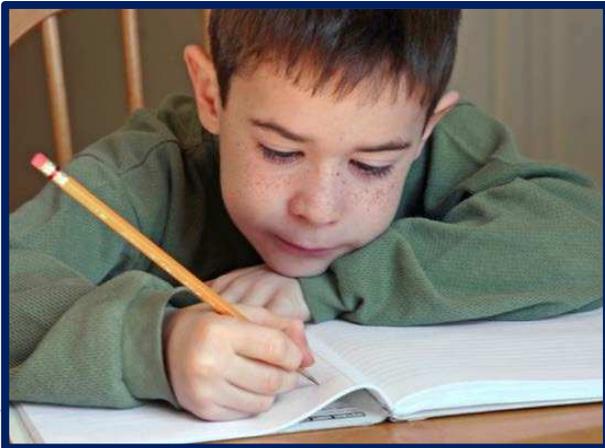
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Vulnerabilities

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- Family instability, financial hardship, domestic violence, substance misuse, mental health problems
- Effects are profound and long-lasting
- Poorer educational outcomes
- **Three times** more likely to offend or display anti-social behaviour

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In relation to antisocial & offending outcomes.....

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Custodial sentences

Longer periods of imprisonment

Maternal imprisonment

Boys

Imprisonment since birth, and during adolescence

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Vulnerabilities

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Internalising or “acting in”

Sadness, loss, confusion, despair, depression, shame, guilt, worry, fear, social withdrawal, bed-wetting, nightmares, eating disorders, self-harm, PTSD symptoms

Externalising or “acting out”

Aggression, conduct problems, underage smoking, drug or alcohol consumption, sexual promiscuity, anti-social/criminal behaviour

Three times more likely to experience mental health problems in adulthood, and disproportionally represented in clinical populations

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Prison Visiting

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Maintaining *frequent* contact associated with:

- more satisfying parent-child relationships during imprisonment and upon release
- better emotional adjustment and more effective coping skills on behalf of the child
- better outcomes for the imprisoned parent



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COPING Project

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UK, Germany, Sweden,
Romania

Children aged 7- 17
with a parent in prison



Mapping of
services and
interventions

Over 700 questionnaire
surveys

In-depth interviews
with 135 families

Consultations with
NGOs, prison staff,
social workers &
policy makers

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Questionnaire Survey

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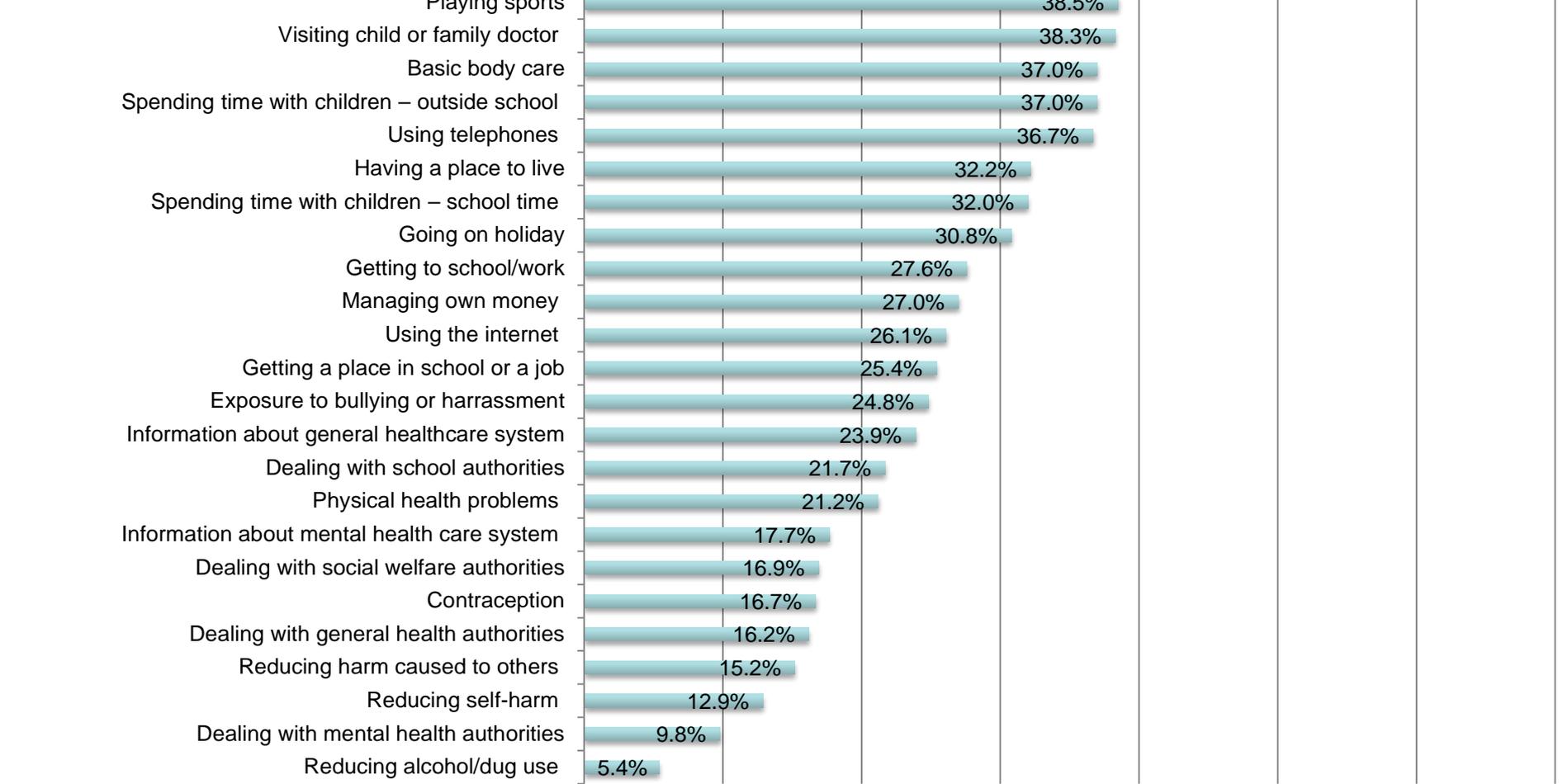
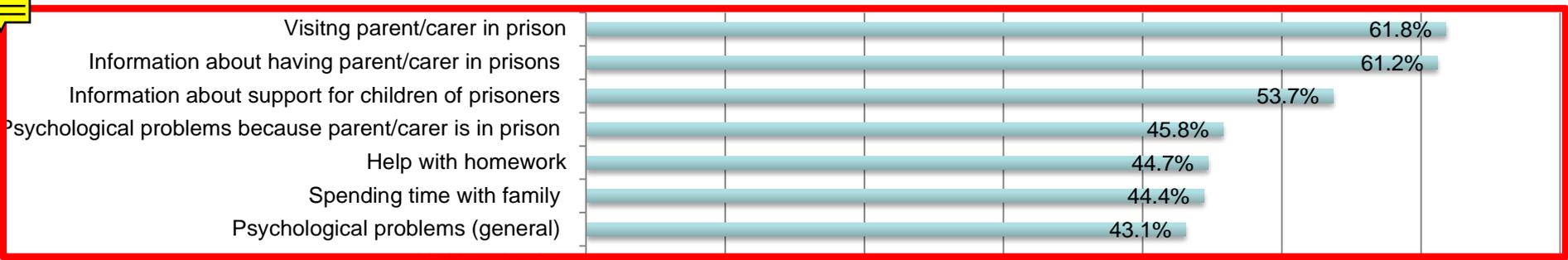
- 25% of children at *heightened risk* of mental health problems
- Considerably more difficulties in terms of emotions and peer relations (in particular) and conduct and hyperactivity

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Interviews

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Initial period of destabilisation and trauma, followed by children and families adjusting and emphasising being 'normal'.

"For me coping has meant getting through a tough time in life. The tough time has been from the moment my Father was sentenced, I've had to continually adapt to changes in my life." **Young Person**



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Resiliency Factors

1. Caregiving arrangement
2. Extended family
3. School & peer support
4. NGOs and agencies

Family violence, drugs, alcohol, caregiver stress and depression

Communication delayed, less open, secrecy

Maladaptive coping strategies

Contact with imprisoned parent sporadic, awkward, future uncertain



Honesty and openness

Effective coping strategies

Early, continuing, good quality contact with imprisoned parent



Communication

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“Children are good at imagining things when we are not told the truth. The grown ups always say that they don’t know, but they know more than we do, and that is what we want to know.”

13 year old girl

“I know she’s done wrong, and she needs to be in there, but she’s still my mum.” **9 year old girl**

“My sister and me – we are real masters at suppressing things.” **14 year old girl**

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Stigma & Secrecy

“There is stigma, and we women and children suddenly have a flaw, for which we are not responsible. We can’t go into public with this flaw. And that’s bad. Really bad”.
Non-imprisoned mother

“I was nervous telling them. I told them and the head teacher said ‘I am glad you came straight away and didn’t leave it for ages...we care about what’s happened, and we are there for your kids...”.
Non-imprisoned mother

“Say if I wanted my mum, the teachers would say ‘Calm down and go and wash your face because you have been crying...there is nothing to worry about’. The teachers, they aren’t nasty, they are nice.”
Girl aged 9

Insp

