Vulnerable families: A study of Indigenous paternal imprisonment and its impact on Indigenous children, their caregivers and communities

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This project contains two studies that were conducted as part of the Indigenous Criminal Justice Research Agenda (ACJRA) for Queensland Government. The aim of the first study (Study 1) was to examine Indigenous men's identities as fathers in prison, the barriers associated with maintaining contact with their children and engaging in aspects of fathering that are important to the individual and within their culture. A number of longitudinal studies internationally have demonstrated that having a father in prison is causally related to an increase in antisocial behaviour and poor developmental outcomes in children. However, the precise mechanisms associated with the transmission of risk due to parental imprisonment have not been adequately studied. Furthermore, the removal of Indigenous fathers through imprisonment, in such large numbers from their communities, has the potential to have devastating effects on their children's development and the accumulation of disadvantage, social exclusion and risk to children, to families, and to their communities more broadly. This comes in the wake of many of these fathers growing up without fathers of their own due to forced removals or other consequences of colonisation. Study 1 utilised interviews with 41 Indigenous fathers across two prisons in North Queensland to address the following research questions:

(1) In what capacity are Indigenous men able to engage in parenting from prison?
(2) What is the degree and quality of contact that Indigenous men have with their children while in prison?
(3) What barriers do Indigenous fathers experience in maintaining relationships and parenting while in prison?
(4) What can be done to better support Indigenous fathers in prison?

The aim of the second study (Study 2) was to examine the experiences and challenges for women who live in a remote Aboriginal community and are caring for children with a father in prison. Caregivers often experience emotional and financial hardship and stigma in caring for children with a father in prison, yet they play an important role in maintaining contact between the child and their father. Extended family and community support has been found to be a significant factor in the

wellbeing of caregivers (Turanovic, Rodriguez & Pratt, 2012). Study 2 is a pilot study comprising interviews with six Indigenous women, caring for children with a father in prison, who reside in a remote Indigenous community in North Queensland. The following four research questions were addressed in Study 2:

(1) To what extent do caregivers and children maintain contact with the father in prison?
(2) What barriers do families experience in maintaining contact with fathers in prison?
(3) What are the main challenges for caregivers of children with a father in prison?
(4) To what extent do caregivers receive support from extended family members and their community?

Methods

Study 1 – Interviews with Indigenous fathers in prison

The sample comprised 41 Indigenous male prisoners serving sentences in one of two Queensland prisons between February and November 2010. Twenty-eight (68.3%) participants were serving sentences at Lotus Glen Correctional Centre and thirteen (31.7%) were serving sentences at Townsville Correctional Centre. Participants' ages ranged from 21 - 50 years with a median of 34 years (M = 33.54, SD = 7.45). Thirty-four (82.9%) participants identified themselves as Aboriginal; two identified themselves as Torres Strait Islander (4.9%); and five identified themselves as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (12.2%). All but three participants had served a prior sentence (92.1%).

The data in this study was derived from three sources: (1) A brief pen and paper questionnaire administered to all participants. The questionnaire comprised 20 questions relating to demographic information about the participants and each of their children. Whether or not the participant lived with the child or had visitation with the child prior to their imprisonment was also recorded. The questionnaire took approximately 10 minutes to complete; (2) A semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant to examine the degree and quality of contact that Indigenous men had with their children while in prison, their capacity to engage in parenting from prison, barriers to parenting, and what kind of support these fathers

might find beneficial. Interviews took approximately one hour to complete, although varied from as little as half an hour up to one-and-a-half hours; and (3) Offence and sentencing data from Queensland Corrective Services was obtained through the Integrated Offender Management System (IOMS).

Study 2 – Interviews with caregivers

Participants were six Indigenous women from a remote community in North Queensland. The ages of the participants ranged from 30 – 57 years, although three women did not provide their age. Each participant was caring for a child, or children, with a father in prison. Two of the women were the biological mothers of the children, one participant was a grandmother, and three women described other kinship relationships with the children. Collectively the women were caring for 16 children; 14 children with a biological father in prison and two children with a stepfather in prison. The ages of the children ranged from less than one year old to 14 years of age.

The research materials consisted of a semi-structured interview. The themes covered by the interview questions consisted of the following: (1) The interpersonal relationship between the caregiver and the imprisoned father; (2) Contact between the child and their father in prison; and (3) Extended family and community support. Questions were not always asked in the same order and not all participants answered each question. Furthermore, the degree of information that they provided in relation to the questions varied greatly.

Summary of Findings – Studies 1 and 2

Many men found it difficult to be involved as a father from prison. However, parental involvement was rarely high prior to imprisonment. While approximately half of the children were living with their father prior to his imprisonment, less than a quarter of men reported being involved in the day-to-day care of their children. Almost half of the men grew up without their father present and a quarter of men described experiencing harsh or abusive parenting. Therefore opportunities to learn about being a father were limited, a finding consistent with research on Indigenous fathers (Ball, 2009; Hammond et al., 2004). Importantly, half of the men interviewed expressed the desire to participate in a parenting program while in prison and 40% of men reported that they would also like to be offered a post-release program to support

them in their reintegration back into the family, to assist their communication with caregivers and help them develop and maintain strong relationships with their children.

The quality of men's relationships with their children while imprisoned was related to the opportunities that they had for contact with their children. The major barriers to men maintaining a relationship with their children is the distance that families need to travel to visit, the expense of travel and accommodation to conduct a visit and the expense of STD phone calls. Less than a quarter of men had ever received a visit from one of their children in the 12 months prior to the interview. Visits were often one-off or sporadic. Two thirds of fathers in the current study made phone calls to at least one of their children while almost approximately a quarter of men mentioned writing to their children. For some fathers the phone calls were regular but for other fathers their phone calls were more intermittent. Almost two thirds of men indicated that they had problems maintaining a relationship with at least one of their children. Men reported losing a feeling of closeness to their children if they were not able to talk to them regularly or see them during visits. It was evident that for men who did not receive visits and who did not have regular phone or letter contact with children, that their imprisonment created a greater distance between them and their children.

Caregiver's experiences of caring for a child with a father in prison tended to exist separately from the correctional system. Most women were unsure of the sentence length of the father, suggesting that their care of the children did not revolve around anticipated release dates. Four of the six women were caring for children with whom they had kinship ties and had facilitated contact between the child and their father where possible. However, half of the 16 children in this study had no contact with their father and only three children had visited their father. The cost of phone calls and the difficulty in organising and affording a prison visit were cited as some reasons for such infrequent contact with the children's fathers. Most women viewed it as their role to look after the children when their father was imprisoned, but also indicated that it was a burden shared by relatives and the community more generally. Most of the women reported that they received support of extended family members and others in the community; yet felt that additional services in the community were needed to support families of prisoners.

Conclusions and Recommendations

For many imprisoned men, their status as a father goes unrecognised within the confines of the prison fences. Some men are determined to have a positive influence in their children's lives and are taking opportunities to better themselves and build their parenting skills. But these opportunities are currently very limited with the correctional system. There is a clear scope to provide parenting programs in prisons and a strong desire by half of the men interviewed to participate in such programs. There is also a need to improve the quality and quantity of contact that Indigenous men have with their families. Prior research has demonstrated that if contact with children is not available during imprisonment, this can make adjustment upon release very difficult for fathers and their children, with ripple effects on communities.

There was also some evidence that at least in one remote Indigenous community, extended family networks and the community as a whole bears the burden of high rates of male imprisonment through caring for the children left behind. While more research is needed to examine the generalisability of these findings across caregivers and communities, it is also important to explore ways to support communities and caregivers in their care of children of imprisoned fathers. The following recommendations are based on the key findings of the two studies.

Recommendation 1: Provide Indigenous men the opportunity to develop their parenting skills through participation in a program in prison. The program should be developed in consultation with Indigenous fathers and be facilitated by respected Elders. The program should also provide the opportunity for Elders within the prison to share their experiences and guidance.

Recommendation 2: Develop post-release programs for men to assist their transition back into the family or community and to aid in the development of their parenting skills and transference of knowledge from prison programs to the community.

Recommendation 3: Improve the opportunities for men to have more frequent contact with their children, where it is desired and importantly, in the interests of the father and child. This could take place in the following ways: (a) subsidise STD calls for

men whose children live in remote communities and have less opportunities to visit; (b) improve prison transport services so that families can have better access to prison visits; (c) provide better access to videoconferencing in prisons and in the community by exploring more cost effective ways to communicate, such as through Skype; (d) support men with poor literacy to maintain contact with children through means other than letter writing, such as by sharing artwork or recording stories for their children.

Recommendation 4: Improve the quality of visits between fathers and their families in the following ways: (a) Improve the conditions of the visits area by providing opportunities and resources for fathers to play with their children; (b) make visit areas more visually appealing and less intimidating for children; (c) where families are unable to make regular visits, explore ways to allow for extended visiting time for families; (d) create opportunities for fathers to share their culture and practice their parenting skills through family days where families can share a meal together, share stories and engage in activities together; and (e) create opportunities for families to have a photo taken together during visits.

Recommendation 5: Develop a service that supports Indigenous children of prisoners, particularly in relation to understanding and coping with emotions regarding separation.

Recommendation 6: Examine ways to support the healthy development of children of prisoners in their communities. This includes: (a) supporting caregivers in their role through better access to services; (b) identifying ways for children to interact with and learn from male role models in their community; (c) culturally appropriate and indvidualised support services for children to assist them with their needs, regardless of whether they maintain contact with their imprisoned father. Such services and activities should be developed in consultation with the relevant community and ideally, provided by members of that community.

CONTENTS

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of longitudinal studies internationally have demonstrated that having a father in prison is causally related to an increase in antisocial behaviour and poor developmental outcomes in children. However, results from these studies also reveal that parental imprisonment may have no impact on children in countries where prison policies facilitate the maintenance of family relationships and the stigma and shame associated with the imprisonment of a family member is less pronounced. Nevertheless, the precise mechanisms associated with the transmission of risk due to parental imprisonment have not been adequately studied. Furthermore, research on the impact of imprisonment on Australian fathers and their families is virtually non-existent.

A group over-represented in all Australian criminal justice data, including imprisonment rates, is Indigenous males. Not only do we know very little about challenges associated with fathering in Australian prisons, we know even less about any unique risks arising from the imprisonment of Indigenous Australian fathers. Most recently, and in light of the mounting evidence that imprisonment of parents can have profound intergenerational consequences, Sampson (2011) has called for the consequences of imprisonment, in all its guises, to be examined more thoroughly and broadly. He argued, "it is incumbent on crimininologists to think in terms of the social ledger of incarceration's effects" (Sampson, 2011, p. 820). Nowhere could this be truer or more urgent than in relation to Indigenous fathers and Indigenous communities. The removal of Indigenous fathers through imprisonment, in such large numbers from their communities, has the potential to have devastating effects on their children's development and the accumulation of disadvantage, social exclusion and risk to children, to families, and to their communities more broadly. This comes in the wake of many of these fathers growing up without fathers of their own due to forced removals or other consequences of colonisation, such as alcohol and drug abuse.

In an era where we are attempting to 'close the gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children, it is imperative that we begin to examine the role of imprisonment in the lives of Indigenous fathers and their children and communities. According to the recent publication of the *Report Card: The wellbeing of Australian*

children (ARACY, 2013), Indigenous Australian children are seven times more likely to be in out of home care, 10 times more likely to be in youth detention, 11 times more likely to be in an adult prison (18-24 years), three times more likely to be in a jobless family, and three times more likely to suicide (15-24 years) than non-Indigenous Australian children. The imprisonment of a parent is likely to add to the accumulation of disadvantage for Indigenous children that stems from the historical displacement of Indigenous Australians and that continues today through their overrepresentation in the criminal justice system. It is therefore essential that the impact of the imprisonment of Indigenous fathers on the developmental outcomes of their children is examined.

This report represents an important first step in examining Indigenous men's identities as fathers in prison, the barriers associated with maintaining contact with their children and engaging in aspects of fathering that are important to the individual and within their culture. We also examine the experiences and challenges for women who live in a remote Indigenous community and are caring for children with a father in prison. Two studies are presented in this report. The first study utilises interviews with 41 Indigenous fathers across two prisons in North Queensland to examine in what capacity Indigenous men are able to engage in parenting from prison, their involvement with their children prior to and during imprisonment, their plans for release, and the kinds of support or programs that they believe would be beneficial for them. The second is a pilot study that comprises interviews with six Indigenous women, caring for children with a father in prison, who reside in a remote Indigenous community in North Queensland. The aim was to examine their experience of caring for children with a father in prison, including barriers to maintaining contact with the father, kinship and community support, and the challenges for the children in their care.

The following literature review provides a context for considering the potential ramifications of paternal imprisonment for children more generally, before exploring some of the issues that may be more specific to imprisoned Indigenous males and their families.

1.1 Parental Imprisonment and the Wellbeing of Families

1.1.1 *Prevalence of parental imprisonment*

Although the second-generation effects of parental imprisonment on children are beginning to be examined, there is still little knowledge regarding the number of Australian children that are affected by parental imprisonment. A study conducted in New South Wales in 2001 estimated that almost one in 20 NSW children (or approximately 172,00 children) have experienced parental imprisonment in their lifetime (Quilty, 2003; Quilty, Levy, Howard, Barratt & Butler, 2004). This figure is substantially higher for Indigenous children, where approximately one in five Indigenous NSW children have experienced parental imprisonment in their lifetime (Quilty et al., 2004). In terms of children with imprisoned fathers, national estimates were calculated from the data, revealing that one in 200 children (0.5%), 15 years or younger, have a father in prison (Quilty, 2003). In the United States, where an era of mass incarceration has taken place (Clear, 2008; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2011), it has been estimated that in 2007, 52% of state prisoners and 63% of federal prisoners were parents of minor children (Maruschak, Glaze & Mumola, 2010). It was further estimated that one in 43 children (or 1.7 million children) had a parent in prison in 2007 (Maruschak et al., 2010). In approximately 91% of these cases the child lost their father to imprisonment, rather than their mother.

A recent study conducted in Queensland sampled from new prisoner intakes entering male prisons across the State in 2008-2009. It was estimated that just over 8000 children (0.8% of all children in Queensland) experienced paternal imprisonment in one year, while more than 40,000 children (approximately 4%) experienced the imprisonment of their father by the time they were 17 years old (Dennison, Stewart & Freiberg, 2013). A significant finding was that Indigenous children were nine times more likely to experience paternal imprisonment in one year (4.4% of Indigenous children) and four times more likely to experience the imprisonment of their father in their lifetime (12.5% of Indigenous children) compared to non-Indigenous children (Dennison et al., 2013).

The high rates of Indigenous children's experience with parental imprisonment are associated with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander's over-representation in the court system (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012a) and in correctional facilities. According to the 2011 Census, Indigenous people comprise

2.5% of the Australian population, 2.5% of the NSW population and 3.6% of the population in Queensland (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012b). Although the national imprisonment rate declined by 2% in Australia between 2010 and 2011 (to 167 prisoners per 100,000 adult population), the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners increased by 1% during the same period, while the total Australian prisoner population increased by 30% from 2001 to 2011 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Of Indigenous Australians, 90% are of Aboriginal origin, 6% of Torres Strait Islander origin, and 4% identify as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012b).

Despite accounting for a small percentage of the population, Indigenous people comprise approximately 26% of the Australian prison population. This rate is 14 times higher than for non-Indigenous prisoners (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). The percentage of Indigenous prisoners was slightly higher in Queensland (29.7% or 1654 persons; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Furthermore, Indigenous prisoners are more likely to have prior adult imprisonment (74%) than non-Indigenous prisoners (48%; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Based on these figures alone, it is apparent that not only are more Australian children experiencing parental imprisonment with a rise in prisoner rates in the last decade, but that proportionally, Indigenous children are more likely than non-Indigenous children to experience the imprisonment of a parent as well as repeat parental imprisonment.

The study by Dennison et al. (2013) also revealed that 52% of non-Indigenous children and 47% of Indigenous children were living with their father prior to his imprisonment. This is similar to research in the United States where Maruschak et al. (2010) estimated that only 48% of parents in state prison were living with at least one of their children in the month before arrest or just prior to their imprisonment. A larger number of mothers compared to fathers were living with their children prior to imprisonment. The residential status of fathers and children is relevant because using a sample of 3000 children in the United States, Geller, Cooper, Garfinkel, Schwartz-Soicher & Mincy (2012) found a significant positive relationship between paternal imprisonment and increased child aggression. The relationship was stronger if the child had been living with the father prior to his imprisonment (Geller et al., 2012). What is not understood is whether this relationship is due to the trauma and loss associated with the imprisonment of a father who had been living with his children, or whether the aggression is learned behavior from a potentially antisocial father.

In Dennison et al.'s. (2013) study, the biological mother was typically the primary caregiver for the child while the father was in prison (83%). This arrangement did not differ significantly according to the Indigenous status of the child. The findings are reasonably consistent with those in the United States, where almost 90% of state imprisoned fathers reported having at least one child in the care of their biological mother (Maruschak et al., 2010). In Australia there are no figures regarding the type or frequency of contact that imprisoned fathers have with their children. In the United States, less than half (42%) of parents in State prison received a personal visit from their child, with letter writing being the most common form of contact (70%). Weekly contact with children declined with longer time served, from 46% for those who had served less than a year, to 41% for who had served between 12-59 months, down to 34% for those who had served more than 60 months in prison (Maruschak et al. 2010). Findings such as these reveal that any approach to understanding whether and how paternal imprisonment has a detrimental or protective effect on children will be complex and require an understanding of the variations in relationships and contact that exists between children and their imprisoned father.

1.1.2 *The consequences of parental imprisonment for children*

It is difficult to separate the impact of paternal imprisonment as an experience with the correctional system from the other risk factors for the family that are often associated with imprisonment. The imprisonment of a father often results in an increase in financial difficulties, residential instability, changes in childcare and schools, separation from a parent and disruption to parental bonds, stigma, and loss of social support, trauma from witnessing the arrest, and poor parenting, among many other consequential risks (Geller, et al., 2012; Geller, Garfinkel, Cooper & Mincy, 2009; Geller, Garfinkel & Western, 2011; Johnston, 1995; Murray, 2007; Poelmann, 2010; Tasca, Rodriguez & Zatz, 2011). This makes children of prisoners an extremely vulnerable group at significant risk of a range of long-term negative outcomes such as poverty and social exclusion (Foster & Hagan, 2007; Walker & McCarthy, 2005). Results from juvenile delinquency research have found that the arrest and conviction of the father before the child's pre-teen years was one of the best explanatory predictors of the adolescent's later offending and antisocial behaviour (Farrington, 1995; Gabel, 1992; Lowenstein, 1986; Seymour, 1998). The last decade has seen an increase in research addressing the question of whether parental imprisonment

substantially adds to a young person's risk of offending, alcohol and drug abuse and other poor developmental outcomes, above and beyond the risks associated with parental criminality and the presence of a high concentration of other risk factors (e.g., Murray & Farrington, 2005, 2008; Foster & Hagan, 2007; Kinner et al., 2007; Besemer et al., 2011; Geller et al., 2012; see Murray 2010 for a more in depth review of the longitudinal research).

Few studies have been purposively designed to examine the effect of parental imprisonment on children, but rather are longitudinal studies that happen to have recorded if the child's parents were ever imprisoned. As such, the existing studies have inherent weaknesses in sample sizes and often lack information on relevant details or variables. A recent meta-analysis of 40 studies revealed that parental incarceration is associated with a higher risk of antisocial behaviours in children, but not with mental health problems, drug use or poor educational performance (Murray, Farrington & Sekol, 2012). Additionally, a question remains as to whether parental incarceration always exerts a negative effect on families or whether some families do better when the parent is removed from the home, thereby removing risks such as poor role modelling, criminal associates and family violence (Jaffee, Moffitt, Caspi & Taylor, 2003; Wildeman, 2010).

Time away from a parent who has been engaging in dangerous or reckless behaviour may allow the remaining family members to function better (Turanovic, Rodriguez & Pratt, 2012). For some children, the behaviour of their parent in the family home, which may involve drug and alcohol abuse and violence, has created more stressful challenges than coping with their imprisonment, despite the grief and sadness that children might still experience upon their removal from the home (Giordano, 2010). In her analysis of the children of highly delinquent boys and girls from the Ohio Life-Course Study, Giordano (2010) described a complex mixture of emotions for children coping with parental imprisonment. For example, one boy stated that his mother returning from prison was both the best and most stressful events to have happened in the last six months.

A series of studies that are particularly relevant to the role of imprisonment in the lives of families on the outside compare the impact of paternal imprisonment in England to that of Sweden and the Netherlands. Using data from the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development (CSDD), which in its original form contained a sample of 411 boys born in London, Murray and Farrington (2005; 2008) found that

parental imprisonment predicted boys' antisocial and delinquent behaviour up until the age of 40 years. A small group of boys (N = 23) with an imprisoned parent were compared with those separated from their parents due to death or divorce, extended periods of hospitalisation or whose parents were imprisoned prior to the child's birth and never again through their childhood. Even when controlling for parental criminality and other childhood risks, there was a unique contribution of parental imprisonment to poor behavioural outcomes. However, when similar datasets in Sweden (Murray, Janson & Farrington, 2007) and the Netherlands (Besemer, van de Geest, Murray, Bijleveld & Farrington, 2011) were examined the effect of parental imprisonment was not evident. Murray and colleagues (2007) hypothesised that the absence of an effect of parental imprisonment may have been due to the more family-friendly policies in place in Sweden compared to England. Similarly, Besemer and colleagues (2011) suggested that Dutch prisoners tended to have more opportunities for contact with their children and the prisons had a stronger focus on reconciliation compared to England, which had a more punitive approach to detention.

A study by Geller and colleagues (2012) revealed that both boys' and girls' aggressive behaviours were greater if the child had been living with their father, than if they had not, prior to his imprisonment. Poehlman (2010) has also demonstrated that disruption of relationships due to imprisonment is most problematic when parents were involved in the care of their child. Given that Dennison and colleagues (2013) found that almost half of the children in their study were living with their father prior to his imprisonment, the potential for negative outcomes for a significant number of Queensland children should be cause for some concern and warrants further investigation in the Australian context.

1.1.3 *Imprisoned fathers – maintaining contact and returning home*

In most cases, relationships with children are not severed when a father is imprisoned. Dennison and colleagues (2013) found that of children who were living with their father prior to his imprisonment, fathers expected that 88% of the children would be living with them after their release, while 10% were expected to visit their father and only 2% of children were expected to have no further contact with their father. Therefore it is important to consider how the experience of paternal imprisonment changes father-child relationships over time and how it relates to the

positive or negative adjustment of the child upon the father's release and potential return to the family home.

Opportunities to maintain positive relationships may be critical to the wellbeing of the child as well as the rehabilitation of the father. Furthermore the length of the sentence and the repeat imprisonment of the father may affect the maintenance of relationships. For example, in a sample of 412 imprisoned men in the Unites States, Holt and Miller (1972) found that family contact decreased with subsequent prison terms. They hypothesised that this decline in contact may be due to the lack of reciprocity available in relationships with an imprisoned individual as well as reduced optimism regarding the desistance of the individual. As noted previously, in their survey of state prisoners in the United States, Maruschak and colleagues (2010) found that weekly contact declined with longer time served, from 46% for those who had served less than a year, to 41% for those who had served between 12-59 months. These figures declined to 34% for those who had served more than 60 months in prison.

Using interviews with 65 fathers in three prisons in South East Queensland, Smallbone (2012) found that fathers reported problems maintaining relationships with 47% of their children ($N =$ 156 children). The study included non-Indigenous (71%) and Indigenous fathers (29%) and 51.3% of children were of Indigenous descent. More than half of the children had lived with their father prior to his imprisonment (59%) and almost half of the children (49%) were experiencing their first episode of paternal imprisonment. Smallbone (2012) reported that only one third of children (34%) had frequent visits with their imprisoned father, while 66% had frequent phone calls and 68% had contact through letters with their father.

The key findings from the study were that fathers reported experiencing more problems in their relationship with younger children than older children and that fathers were twice as likely to report problems in their relationship with their child if they had not been living with them prior to their imprisonment (Smallbone, 2012). Fathers were also more likely to report problems in maintaining their relationship with their child if they had infrequent visits and infrequent phone calls. Problems in maintaining their relationship with their child were strongly associated with their relationship with the caregiver of the child. When fathers reported problems with the caregiver of their children, they were 13 times more likely to also report problems in maintaining the father-child relationship. Fathers were also six times more likely to

have infrequent phone and letter contact with their children if they had problems in their relationship with the caregiver. Indigenous status of the child and child gender was not associated with problems in maintaining father-child relationships (Smallbone, 2012).

In a recent study of 40 families with an imprisoned father in the United Kingdom, Lösel, Pugh, Markson, Souza and Lanskey (2012) found that the positive adjustment of the child was directly related to the maintenance of the father-child relationship during the imprisonment period. Mothers, children and the imprisoned fathers were interviewed four months prior to the father's release and six months post-release. The authors reported that high quality family relationships, the frequency of contact, the quality of communication between imprisoned fathers and their children, a high level of involvement of the father with children before prison, participation in family-orientated programs while imprisoned as well as less previous involvement of the father with the criminal justice system predicted the child's positive psychological, emotional and behavioural adjustment. Furthermore, higher quality family relationships, good family communication and greater involvement of the father prior to imprisonment predicted more positive relationships between the child and the father as well as children's better school achievement and less trouble with the police (Lösel et al., 2012). On the basis of the findings the authors recommended that resources be directed towards facilitating communication opportunities for families, including high quality visiting experiences and better access to phone calls (Lösel et al., 2012). Although this study was based on a relatively small sample of families, it does suggest that the ability to maintain father-child relationships during the imprisonment period might reduce the likelihood of a negative impact of paternal imprisonment on the child. Clearly more research is needed to address the question of whether and how opportunities to maintain contact with children are beneficial to both the imprisoned father and the child. It is also important to examine what barriers might exist to maintain relationships with children in the Australian context.

Issues of finances and distance are obvious barriers that may be exacerbated in States such as Queensland, where fathers might be imprisoned hundreds of kilometres from their families. Expensive STD calls and travelling long distances with the possibility of needing overnight accommodation may be prohibitive for many families, especially those already experiencing financial hardship. Furthermore, the maintenance of the father-child relationship is likely to be dependent upon another

individual facilitating contact in taking the child for visits, receiving phone calls from the prison or posting letters. This responsibility usually resides with the primary caregiver of the child, which in the case of imprisoned fathers, is typically the biological mother of the child, but may also include grandparents, other kinship members or State care (Dennison et al, 2013). Such contact may be irregular or non-existent where the relationship between the imprisoned parent and the caregiver is strained or dissolved (Edin, Nelson & Paranol, 2004; Healy, Foley, & Walsh, 2001; Poehlman, Schlafer, Maes & Hanneman, 2008; Schlafer & Poehlmann, 2010; Smallbone, 2012). Furthermore, the relationship between the imprisoned parent and the caregiver may deteriorate over the term of the imprisonment, resulting in deterioration in the parent-child relationship.

In their interviews with 100 caregivers of children with either a mother or father imprisoned, Turanovic and colleagues (2012) found that the parental imprisonment had a negative effect on 58% of caregivers, while it created no change for 22% of caregivers and for 20% of caregivers the imprisonment of a parent actually improved their situation. The authors concluded that whether caregivers experience positive or negative consequences as a result of parental imprisonment depends upon the level of involvement of the parent prior to their imprisonment (with high involvement leading to a greater negative effect upon imprisonment), the nature and quality of the interpersonal relationship between the imprisoned parent and the caregiver, and the family support system surrounding the caregiver (Turanovic et al., 2012).

While there is a growing recognition that the imprisonment of a parent can have deleterious consequences for children, we do not yet fully understand under what circumstances this occurs and through what mechanisms parental imprisonment exerts an effect on children. Nevertheless, it is becoming clear that caregivers often play a crucial role in maintaining relationships between the imprisoned parent and the child and that their wellbeing and quality of support received during the period of imprisonment may mediate the negative or positive experiences of the child. Given some difference observed in longitudinal studies in the United Kingdom, Sweden and the Netherlands, it is possible that the policies of prisons that facilitate or inhibit the maintenance of relationships between the imprisoned parent and the family also affects the well-being of children. Certainly there is some emerging evidence that children fare better upon the release of their father if quality relationships have been

maintained during the prison term. However, none of these studies have taken place in Australia. It is important to examine in what capacity fathers in Australian prisons are able to be engaged in the lives of their children and maintain positive relationships with their families.

The limited national and international research on the consequences of parental incarceration for children has not addressed the question of whether (or how) Indigenous incarceration affects children. As stated by the Aboriginal Services Directorate (2003), kinship within Indigenous communities is more intricate than the nuclear family. Biological relationships do exist, however extended and tribal family are also recognised (Aboriginal Services Directorate, 2003). Removal and subjugation by incarceration of one or more parents or kinship family members, and the removal of Indigenous children into State care continues to erode the security that the traditional Indigenous family once provided (Howard, 2001). In light of the above research, it is important that the unique role of Indigenous fathers and kinship members in children's lives is recognised in order to assess the potential consequence of Indigenous paternal imprisonment on children as well as the consequences of the removal of high numbers of males from remote communities. Dodson and Hunter (2006) argue that to understand the links between the relationship of criminality and the family environment there is a need for longitudinal data that "explicitly examines the developmental processes facing Indigenous children" (p. 35). In the next section the role of Indigenous fathers is explored in order to consider how father-child relationships might be interrupted within an Indigenous context of paternal imprisonment.

1.2 Indigenous Australian Fathers and Fathering

Indigenous Australians are not one homogenous group, but represent hundreds of different nations and different languages on mainland Australia and across the Torres Strait Islands (Gibbs, 1993). According to Howard (2000),

> Family was the most binding and integral element of Indigenous societies. A child's development and rites of passage, physical and emotional safety and cultural education were the responsibility of the community and family. Socialisation of children occurred through continual interaction with siblings, immediate and extended family members and parents, also in the broadest contexts with uncles and aunts. Extremely strong emotional ties underpinned the essence of how the Indigenous community existed and its ability to deal with issues.

> Individual identity was connected totally to the group, environment and cosmic world. (p. 225)

According to Howard (2000), the dislocation of Indigenous families from land, from families and from communities and the cultural fragmentation resulting from colonization raises questions about how "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males learn to be men and learn how to father" (p. 1). As the ratio of Indigenous children to Indigenous adults is approximately one to one (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012c), when adult males are absent in communities due to imprisonment, the consequences for the socialisation, emotional development, cultural transference and economic provision may be profoundly detrimental (Howard, 2000; Edney, 2002). According to Edney (2002) these criminal justice responses erode the 'social capital' of Indigenous communities. He argues that:

> The ignorance of the effects on indigenous communities of the imprisonment of so many of their own unfortunately obscures the centrality of State involvement in the punishment of indigenous persons. It allows for the cultivation and production of a discourse which, relying on liberal premises of individuality and accountability to justify the infliction of punishment, ignore the nature of *group harm* experienced by indigenous communities as a result of imprisonment. (p. 225)

In traditional Indigenous societies, men carried the responsibilities of "protectors, providers, leaders and skilled hunters" (Howard, 2001, p. 2). But as a consequence of colonisation and the arrival of Government administered Communities or missions, Aboriginal men were no longer responsible for the provision of food, shelter and emotional safety of their families (Howard, 2001). As a result, the sources that provided their sense of identity were destroyed (Howard, 2001). This is not unique to Australia. In countries such as Canada where government interventions also disrupted and displaced Indigenous families and communities, the sociocultural transmission of father roles and opportunities for Indigenous fathers to play a positive role in the lives of their children has been drastically interrupted (Manahan & Ball, 2007; Ball, 2009). In fact, Ball (2009) states "Indigenous fathers are arguably the most socially excluded population of fathers around the world" (p. 29).

In the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2002 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004), 38% of respondents indicated that they and/or

at least one of their relatives had, been removed from their natural family. The intergenerational consequences of colonisation and the institutional care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children has given rise to problems in the transference of parenting skills. The *Bringing Them Home* report (Australia National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families, 1997) highlighted this very problem of loss of parenting skills. According to attachment theory and theories of generativity, the experience of being cared for during childhood by a father role model is critical to the development of fathering (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999). Indigenous children who were raised in institutional care had no experience of being in a family and received no modeling for nurturing behaviours or parenting (Howard, 2001). Subsequent generations of Indigenous children may continue to be affected by this legacy through a "generational cycle of trauma" (Manahan & Ball, 2007, p. 44). For example, in the Young Aboriginal Fathers Project in NSW, five out of the 10 fathers had not had much involvement with their own fathers (Hammond, Lester, Fletcher & Pascoe, 2004). In the Canadian context, Ball (2009) suggests, "when Indigenous men become fathers, most are venturing into a role and set of relationships that have little personal resonance" (p. 32).

In Australia, traditional ways of raising children have been disrupted by colonisation, forced removals and high rates of imprisonment of Indigenous males (Jia, 2000; Howard, 2000; Ball, 2009). This increases the risk that young males growing up in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities will not have significant male role models in their lives (see, for example, Jia, 2000). This is but one way that imprisonment reaches into communities. As Clear (2008) succinctly states:

> The individual-level effects of incarceration on those who go to prison ripple outward. Imprisonment is also an intervention in to the lives of people who may never go there themselves. There are three levels of such effects. Imprisonment affects the children of people who are locked up and their families; it affects community infrastructure – the relations among people in communities and the capacity of a community to be a good place to live, work, and raise children – and it affects how safe a community is to live in. (pp. 98-99)

Drawing on data in the United States (Clear, 2008) argues that incarceration is concentrated in communities of disadvantage, particularly in relation to race. Men

from these communities cycle through prison at astonishing rates, affecting these men's social networks, social relationships and future prospects. Such effects become destructive forces in the lives of their children, family functioning, and in the economic, social and political infrastructure of these communities (Clear, 2008; Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999). Imprisonment changes household compositions and restructures kin relations (Braman, 2004). Whatever strains are removed from the family with the removal of the offending parent appear to be replaced with new strains, which researchers conclude produce a net negative for families (Braman, 2004) and destabilizes the capacity of communities to provide informal social control, and thereby safety in the community and the prevention of delinquency (Rose & Clear, 1998; Clear, 2008). The effect of the removal and return of individuals from and to communities and the effect that this has on crime in these communities has been termed 'coercive mobility', and has its most deleterious effects when large numbers of members of a community are caught in the cycle (Rose and Clear, 1998; Clear, 2008). The effect of such coercive mobility on some Indigenous communities may be profound, but is yet to be fully examined.

In conjunction with the decrease of adult males in communities to contribute to the social and economic wellbeing of the community, there are also concerns that young men may wish to emulate the behaviour of their fathers and other significant adult males, by making their 'rite of passage' into prison (Howard, 2000). However, in a study conducted in the Northern Territory, Ogilvie and Van Zyl (2001) concluded that detention did not replace traditional rites of passage for young Indigenous males, but it was another avenue for constructing an identity, particularly when the likelihood of creating a prosocial identity through employment and education seemed more unlikely. More importantly, detention was an opportunity to do something new, which life in a remote community could not offer them. Therefore the perceived desire for young Indigenous males to enter prison was less to do with a desire to emulate older Indigenous males, but more a result of the continuing marginalisation and social exclusion of these young people coupled with the familiarity of having family members in prison (Ogilvie & Van Zyl, 2001). Creating opportunities for imprisoned Indigenous fathers to develop fathering identities and skills, to build relationships with their children and to provide emotional support for the development of their children could interrupt this potentially destructive cycle.

In a Canadian study involving conversational interviews with 80 First Nation and Métis fathers in British Columbia, the majority of fathers described an absence of a father or father figure or the presence of an abusive father (Ball, 2009). They explained that either they had no image of fathering to draw upon, or that they actively tried to not be like their fathers. Furthermore, the experience of becoming a father did not bring forward an immediate connection with fatherhood. Almost half of the fathers in the study had little or no contact with their first-born child. It was not until subsequent partnerships were developed that the men became involved with children who came later. They described having to learn to be affectionate as adults and to communicate emotions, as these were not learned in residential schools (Ball, 2009). Ball (2009) concluded that "Indigenous fathers' stories point to the need for investments in programs for fathers, including social fathers, delivered by fathers, with an initial emphasis on helping fathers understand what children need and how, concretely and with few resources, fathers can meet their needs" (p. 45).

The need for culturally appropriate prison programs to assist in the development of fathering skills requires serious consideration. However, Howard (2001, p. 5) notes that "(R)estoring familiarity with essential aspects of 'traditional' culture and then pride in their cultural identity is necessary for Indigenous adults before appropriate parenting behaviours can be addressed in parenting programs". It is also important to recognise that traditional ways of raising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and the traditional values may differ to non-Indigenous parenting practices, and may even be regarded negatively by those adopting a Western European approach to parenting (Malin, Campbell & Agius, 1996). It is therefore important for those designing or working in Indigenous parenting programs to understand Indigenous frameworks for raising children.

1.3 The Current Research

1.3.1 *Study 1: Interviews with Indigenous fathers in prison*

Edney (2002) asserts that the perspectives of Indigenous prisoners are typically ignored in Australian criminological research and more often viewed as objects rather than subjects. Their experiences are more often recorded in statistical measures with very little research including the narratives of Indigenous prisoners,

while the experiences of their families and communities are ignored (Edney, 2002). The aim of Study 1 is to address these criticisms and the general dearth of research on Australian Indigenous fathers in prison by interviewing Indigenous men about their experience of being a father prior to, and during, imprisonment. Men were interviewed in two North Queensland prisons; these being Lotus Glen Correctional Centre outside of Cairns and Townsville Correctional Centre. These prisons were chosen because they are the two prisons that house men from rural and remote communities in North Queensland. A specific focus of this research was to examine the degree and quality of contact that men have with their children and the specific barriers to maintaining contact that arise due to distance from families and communities. Four over-arching research questions guided this research:

(1) In what capacity are Indigenous men able to engage in parenting from prison? To this end we were interested in how involved men were with the general care of their children as well as the social and cultural aspects of parenting prior to their imprisonment. We were also interested in how the capacity to continue these roles changed while in prison and whether men are able to be, or see themselves as, role models to their children while in prison.

(2) What is the degree and quality of contact that Indigenous men have with their children while in prison? Within this question we examine the extent to which men receive visits and letters from their children and how frequently they make telephone contact with their children. We also examine the quality of each of these forms of communication in relation to the extent that they facilitate maintenance of relationships between fathers and their children.

(3) What barriers do Indigenous fathers experience in maintaining relationships and parenting while in prison? Within this research question we examine the role of barriers to maintaining contact with children due to distance, finances, relationship with caregivers of the children, prison policies, personal communication skills as well as men's own experiences with their fathers and the potential for learned parenting skills.

(4) What can be done to better support Indigenous fathers in prison? Within this question we examine men's participation in family-oriented programs while in prison, their desire to receive support to develop and maintain quality relationships with their children, and what that kind of support might look like both within the prison environment and in the community where their families reside.

1.3.2 *Study 2: Interviews with caregivers of children of imprisoned fathers*

Study 2 consists of a pilot study examining the experiences of six caregivers in a remote Indigenous community in Queensland who are caring for children with a father in prison. The community was chosen because on the basis of interviews with the fathers in prison, there were known to be a number of men from this community in prison. Although interviews with caregivers were not linked to interviews with participants from Study 1, the study created an opportunity for caregivers to tell their stories and to examine whether and what type of support might be beneficial to children of prisoners and caregivers in communities. Four overarching research questions guided this study: (1) *To what extent do caregivers and children maintain contact with the father in prison?* (2) *What barriers do families experience in maintaining contact with fathers in prison?* (3) *What are the main challenges for caregivers of children with a father in prison? (4) To what extent do caregivers receive support from extended family members and their community?*

CHAPTER 2. METHODS

2.1 Study 1: Interviews with Indigenous Fathers in Prison

2.1.1 *Participants*

The sample comprised 41 Indigenous male prisoners serving sentences in one of two Queensland prisons between February and November 2010. Twenty-eight (68.3%) participants were serving sentences at Lotus Glen Correctional Centre and thirteen (31.7%) were serving sentences at Townsville Correctional Centre (both high security facilities). Participants' ages ranged from 21 - 50 years with a median of 34 years (M = 33.54, SD = 7.45). Thirty-four (82.9%) participants identified themselves as Aboriginal; two identified themselves as Torres Strait Islander (4.9%); and five identified themselves as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (12.2%). Two participants were on remand at the time of the interview and 39 participants were serving sentences. Sentence lengths ranged from 5 - 180 months (n = 36 due to missing data) with a median sentence length of 39 months (M = 56.86, SD = 48.28). One participant had a Life sentence for murder. Because in Queensland offenders are required to serve a minimum of 15 years for a murder conviction, an estimation of 15 years was included in the analysis for this participant. All but three participants had served a prior sentence (92.1%), and the number of prior sentences ranged from 0 – 14, with a median of four prior sentences (M = 4.62, SD = 3.29). This analysis excludes one participant who had 32 prior sentences and was deemed an outlier. The total cumulative time fathers had spent in prison ranged from 0 – 236 months, with a median of 45.50 months (M = 64.97, SD = 58.12).

Only three participants were married and living with their spouse prior to their incarceration, but 21 (51.2%) reported that they were in a steady relationship and living with their partner. Fourteen (34.1%) reported that they were not in any close relationship prior to their incarceration. The remaining participants reported having either a new or casual partner (2.4%) or were in a steady relationship but not living with their partner (4.9%). The highest level of education attained was some university (2.4%) and TAFE (4.9%), and the majority (63.4%) of participants had left school by grade ten. In terms of employment status, most participants were working either full-time (31.7%) or part-time (17.1%), while 41.4% were receiving government benefits and one participant (2.4%) was studying prior to their incarceration. Participants reported a total of 129 children under the age of 18. The number of

children per participant ranged from one to nine (M = 3.15, SD = 2.09). In the majority of cases (90.6%) participants were the biological fathers of the children they reported. The remainder had been step-fathers of the children for at least 12 months. The majority (64.7%) of fathers had children to one mother, 23.5% had children to two mothers and 11.8% had children to three mothers (M = 1.47, SD = 0.71, Median = 1.00). Five participants were excluded from this analysis because it was unclear how many mothers they had children to, but it was approximated that these fathers had children to between two and four different mothers. An additional participant reported that he had 16 children to thirteen different mothers but he only discussed nine children and therefore this participant was also excluded from the above analysis.

In terms of the characteristics of the participants in this study, our sample was slightly older (Median = 34 years) than the Indigenous men in the 2010 Australian prison population (Median = 30.5 years), which was likely due the selection criteria that all men in our study were fathers. The men in our sample also had longer median sentence lengths (39 months) than the general Indigenous prison population (24 months), possibly due to our sample being drawn from high secure facilities in North Queensland. Similarly, the men in our sample had higher rates of prior imprisonment (92.1%) than the general Indigenous prison population (74%; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010).

2.1.2 *Materials*

The data in this study were derived from three sources: A brief questionnaire administered to all participants, a semi-structured interview with each participant, and data from Queensland Corrective Services. Each of these data sources will be described below.

Brief questionnaire. A brief pen and paper questionnaire was administered to participants prior to the interview. Each question was read aloud to the participant and completed by the interviewer to avoid problems with literacy. The questionnaire comprised 20 questions relating to demographic information about the participants and each of their children. This included questions pertaining to the participant's age, ethnicity, marital status, and employment and education status immediately prior to imprisonment. The number of children of each participant as well as their gender and age was recorded. Whether or not the participant lived with the child or had visitation with the child prior to their imprisonment was also recorded. The questionnaire took approximately 10 minutes to complete. The Integrated Offender Management System (IOMS) identification numbers of each participant

were recorded in order to match with official offender and sentence data from Queensland Corrective Services.

Semi-structured interview. Face to face semi-structured interviews were conducted to examine the degree and quality of contact that Indigenous men had with their children while in prison, their capacity to engage in parenting from prison, barriers to parenting, and what kind of support these fathers might find beneficial. Interviews took approximately one hour to complete, although varied from as little as half an hour up to one-and-a-half hours. The interviews comprised the following seven broad categories: Contact and relationship with the child; relationship with the caregiver; parenting style and role modeling for child; maintaining contact with the child (i.e., visits, phone calls and letter contact) and potential problems with contact; how father perceived that being in prison had changed their child's life; whether men wanted parenting support while in prison and what that support might look like; and whether they anticipated living with their children or having visitation access upon release from prison. Each category included several questions expanding on each topic, depending upon the initial responses of the participant. If participants required prompting, examples were provided. As permission to audio record the interviews was denied by the General Manager of each prison, detailed notes were taken during the interviews. The interviewer then expanded on these notes within 24 hours of the interview before typing them up in their complete form. The method of coding these interviews is described in a subsequent section.

Queensland Corrective Services data. Queensland Corrective Services (QCS) provided current and previous sentence information for each participant. All data provided by QCS were de-identified and matched to interview transcripts using IOMS identification numbers. The data included demographic information as well as admission dates for each participant's current episode in prison as well as admission and discharge dates for all prior episodes. This information was used to examine the representativeness of the participants to other Indigenous prisoners and to their children's experiences with prior episodes and cumulative time of paternal imprisonment.

2.1.3 *Interview coding: Final dataset and variables*

The 41 fathers provided data about 129 children. Interview responses were thematically grouped and coded. The second author completed all coding, with any difficulties in coding reconciled through discussions with the first author. Coding strategies included both deductive (theory driven) and inductive (data driven) processes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss, 1987). As suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), coding began

with a provisional start list of a priori codes based upon the conceptual framework and research questions described earlier in the report. Examples of these deductive codes are 'problems maintaining contact with children', 'problems with current caregiver', and 'father involvement prior to prison' which had been shown in the literature to be associated with problems maintaining the father-child relationship when a father in imprisoned (Lösel et al., 2012). This was supplemented by more inductive coding based upon themes that emerged from the prisoners' open-ended responses. For example, specific questions were not asked whether their own father was absent or if they had been raised with harsh or abusive parenting styles, but these were themes that emerged with many participants. In addition, fathers were not asked if they were informed about their children by other relatives or community members coming and going from prison but again this was a common theme. These thematic groups will be utilized in the results section to provide a context for the quantitative analysis, drawing on quotes where appropriate. The excerpts used are derived from the field notes of the interviewer and individual fathers are identified with simple participant numbers (P1, P2 etc.).Once this coding was complete, additional coding was performed to create categorical variables that would allow for frequency and descriptive statistics. The following section outlines the variables that were included in the final dataset. A complete coding schedule is available in the Appendix.

2.1.4 *Final variables*

Parenting variables.

Participant's father absent (yes/no). Participants were considered to have been raised with an absent father if they specifically stated that their father had been absent or if they discussed growing up with a single mother or other primary caregiver (e.g., grandparents, DCS or other kinship member).

Raised with harsh or abusive parenting style (yes/not stated). Participants were considered to have been raised with harsh or abusive parenting styles if they discussed having caregivers who used aggressive forms of discipline (e.g., hitting), or if they discussed being subjected to physical, sexual or mental abuse.

Same parenting style as own caregiver (yes/no). Participants were asked "Do you follow any of the same parenting skills as your father?" The parenting style of their primary caregiver was included if they had not been raised by their parents.

Involved in disciplining children (yes/no). Participants were asked "How were you involved in disciplining your child?" If participants described being involved in disciplining their child, this was considered 'yes' and if they reported that they had no involvement in

disciplining their child this was considered 'no'. Examples included imposing family rules, discussing with their children when they break rules, and punishing inappropriate behaviour.

Played with children (yes/no). Participants were considered to have played with their children prior to their incarceration if they discussed playing or interacting regularly with at least one of their children. This included playing games, taking them to parks/beaches or engaging in sporting activities.

Involved in day to day care of children (yes/no). Participants were considered to have been involved in day-to-day care of their children prior to their incarceration if they discussed having been involved in meal preparation or feeding young children, changing nappies, participating in bath time, or taking them to or picking them up from school.

Cultural engagement. This variable has three levels: participants that engaged in cultural activities with their children prior to their incarceration, participants that did not engage in cultural activities with their children prior to incarceration; and participants that did not engage in cultural activities prior to incarceration but intend to upon release.

Role modeling. Participants were asked "Do you still see yourself as a role model to your child during your prison sentence?" This variable has three levels: participants that considered themselves to be a role model during their imprisonment, participants that did not consider themselves to be a role model, and participants that did not consider themselves to be a role model during their imprisonment but intended to be upon their release.

Current parental involvement (yes/no). Participants were asked "What kind of parenting involvement are you able to have with your child now?" If participants reported being involved in parenting (e.g., being involved with decision-making processes with the caregiver) with at least one child during their imprisonment this was considered 'yes'. If participants reported having no parental involvement during their imprisonment or if they had not had contact with any of their children this was considered 'no'.

Perceived negative impact of imprisonment on children (yes/no/unsure). Participants were asked "Do you think or have you noticed that your being in prison is having an effect on your child on the outside? If so, how?" Fathers cited numerous different ways they believed their imprisonment had affected their children. These included being bullied and bullying other children, emotional difficulties, education and learning problems, missing their father or missing out on having a father figure in their lives, experiencing shame, behavioural problems including aggressive or violent behaviour, alcohol or substance use, missing out on important milestones or events and financial problems (i.e., loss of father's income).

Imprisonment history variables.

These variables were created using imprisonment admission and discharge dates provided by QCS. Calculations for each variable were first conducted to determine imprisonment history for each participant and then additional calculations for each variable were conducted using the child's age to determine whether episodes occurred during their lifetime. Three participants were excluded from these analyses due to missing data from QCS.

Previous episode of paternal incarceration (yes/no). Each child's age at the time of each episode was calculated to determine whether the episode had occurred subsequent to the child's birth. Because the children's ages were recorded from fathers' self-reports and not actual birthdates, a decision was made that if the child was at least one year old at the time of the episode admission date they were considered to have experienced an episode of paternal incarceration. One participant was excluded due to having 32 previous imprisonments and thus skewing the data.

Number of previous episodes of paternal incarceration experienced by child. Each observation of previous episodes of paternal incarceration for each child was summed to form a continuous variable.

Cumulative total length of paternal imprisonment experienced by child. The time period of each episode was calculated in months using the official episode admission and discharge dates. Episodes were included if they occurred in the year of the child's birth. For example, if the child was aged ten at the time of the interview and an episode had commenced ten years prior, this was included in the total. The current episode length was calculated in months using the current episode admission date and the date of the interview for each participant. Finally, the time period for each episode was then summed to form a single continuous variable in months. Two participants were on remand at the time of the interview and therefore were excluded from this analysis. An additional participant was excluded due to missing data pertaining to his current sentence.

Contact variables.

Regular visits (yes/no). Participants were asked "Has your child visited you whilst you are in prison" and "If yes, how many times?" Participants were considered to have regular visits if visits from at least one of their children occurred at least weekly, fortnightly, monthly or every couple of months, and considered not to have regular visits if they had received no visits from any of their children or if visits were as rare as once in the past year. For many transcripts it was unclear how often participants received visits from their children. Therefore, if it appeared as though visits occurred sporadically since the beginning of the incarceration period, this was considered as 'no regular visits'. For example, one father (P9)

reported that one of his nine children had come for a "couple of visits" since he had been incarcerated approximately two years prior.

Phone contact (yes/no). Participants were asked "Do you have telephone contact with your child?" and "If yes, how frequently and how do you find this experience?" Participants were considered to have phone contact with at least one of their children if they discussed calling and speaking to their children daily, weekly, fortnightly or monthly, or as often as they could afford. They were considered to have no contact with any of their children if they had not spoken to their children during their imprisonment or for at least six months. This variable was difficult to code as the men were often quite vague as to how frequently they spoke to their children.

Letter contact (yes/no). Participants were asked "Do you ever receive letters from or send letters to your children?" If participants reported having letter contact either with at least one of their children directly or with the caregiver about the child, this was considered letter contact (yes). If participants reported neither sending nor receiving letters this was considered no letter contact (no). For participants who only had letter contact with their child on special occasions (e.g., birthdays), these were also grouped with the 'no letter contact' group (no).

Videoconference contact (yes/not stated). Participants were considered to have had videoconference contact if they had had at least one videoconference with at least one of their children.

Relationship variables.

Father-child relationship problems. Participants were asked "What was your relationship like with [child's name] prior to your sentence?" and "Has this changed during the time that you have spent inside?". There were four separate variables that accounted for whether or not fathers reported the following patterns with at least one of their children (each coded yes/not stated): relationships that remained negative (e.g., when fathers had little or no contact with their child prior to their incarceration); relationships that remained positive (i.e., when fathers reported a good relationship with their child both prior to and during their imprisonment); relationships that changed in positive ways (e.g., when fathers reported developing stronger bonds since their incarceration); and relationships that changed in negative ways (i.e., when fathers reported that relationship problems occurred since or as a result of their incarceration). These were also grouped to form a dichotomous variable of problems/no problems. Relationships that remained negative or changed in negative ways were grouped in the 'problems' level and relationships that remained positive or changed in positive ways were grouped in the 'no problems' level.

Father-caregiver relationship problems (yes/no). Participants were asked "What was your relationship like with the caregiver of the child before you were sent to prison?" and "Has this changed since you have been inside?" Participants were considered to have father-caregiver relationship problems if they discussed problems with at least one of the mothers or primary caregivers of at least one of their children. For example, if a participant discussed a caregiver restricting contact with his children or if he had not had contact with an ex-partner since they separated, this was considered relationship problems (yes). However, if a participant discussed being separated from a caregiver but the relationship remained amicable, this was considered as not having relationship problems (no).

2.1.5 *Procedure*

The study sought male Indigenous prisoners who were serving approximately the last quarter of their sentence and were the father to at least one child under 18 years or were a kinship member (including Uncles) and played a significant role in raising a child under 18 years. Stepfathers were also included in the study providing they were a child's stepfather for at least 12 months at the time of the interview. Prisoners serving sentences for offences that were in any way related to their children (e.g., sexual abuse, physical abuse) were excluded from participating in the study. Permission was granted from Queensland Corrective Services to recruit participants from Townsville Correctional Centre and Lotus Glen Correctional Centre. The General Managers of these prisons subsequently granted approval for the interviews. In recognition that prisoners are a vulnerable population, the researchers were not involved in the recruitment process. Instead, the cultural liaison officers at the prisons were briefed on the project by the first author and approached eligible prisoners directly. Eligible prisoners were provided with a brief overview of the study and asked to put their name down as an expression of interest if they wished to participate. The number of prisoners approached for participation but who declined was not recorded. There were no individual incentives or rewards offered for participation.

Interviews were conducted between February and November 2010. Prior to commencing interviews, participants were provided with an information sheet that was read aloud to participants to circumvent literacy problems. If participants agreed to take part in the study they were provided with a consent form, which among other information, outlined the voluntary nature of the study, the right to withdraw participation at any time without penalty, and limits to confidentiality. This consent form was also read aloud to participants and an opportunity was provided for questions and clarification before consent forms were completed. Two non-Indigenous interviewers, one female and one male, conducted the

interviews. Both interviewers had extensive experience interviewing prisoners, including Indigenous males. Interviews were conducted with the interviewer and the participant in a private room in the correctional centre, with no other persons present. As noted previously, permission to audio record the interviews was requested but denied from the General Manager of each correctional centre. Therefore each interview was recorded in note form during the interview and subsequently expanded upon with additional details within 24 hours of the interview. All participants signed consent forms and the study received approval from Griffith University's Human Research Ethics Committee (CCJ/23/08/HREC).

2.2 Study 2: Interviews with Caregivers of Children of Imprisoned Fathers

2.2.1 *Participants*

Participants were six Indigenous women from a remote community in North Queensland. In the interests of protecting the identity of these women, their community will not be identified. However, to provide some context, the community is considered to be very remote according to the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA). By road, it is more than 600kms (8 hours) from Cairns and more than 950kms (12 hours) from Townsville. The community is considered to be one of the most disadvantaged communities in Australia but also has strengths in its culture and economic and social potential. Over half of the population is under the age of 25 years, while less than 17% are over the age of 44 years. The community has a very stable, immobile, population.

The ages of the participants ranged from 30 – 57 years, although three women did not provide their age. Each participant was caring for a child, or children, with a father in prison. Two of the women were the biological mothers of the children, one participant was a grandmother, and three women described other kinship relationships with the children. For example, one woman was caring for the child of her cousin's sister as well as her nephew. Both of these children's biological fathers were in prison. Another woman was caring for her cousin's children while another woman was caring for her nephew's children. Collectively the women were caring for 16 children; 14 children with a biological father in prison and two children with a stepfather in prison. The ages of the children ranged from less than one year old to 14 years of age.

2.2.2 *Materials*

The research materials consisted of a survey and semi-structure interview. The survey was designed to record demographic information about the caregiver and children with a father in prison and contained standardised questions regarding safety, support and service issues in the community, the wellbeing of the caregiver, risk and protective factors in the child's life and social exclusion measures. Although the survey was reviewed and approved by two Elders in the community prior to commencing the research, none of the participants wished to complete this aspect of the research. Therefore the survey was not utilised. However, each participant agreed to be interviewed in relation to her experiences of caring for a child whose father is imprisoned. The interview was semi-structured and the interview questions are provided below. Questions were not always asked in the same order and not all participants answered each question. Furthermore, the degree of information that they provided in relation to the questions varied greatly. Nevertheless, the interview provided sufficient structure to ensure that the main themes of interest could be explored. Most participants provided some basic demographic information regarding their age and the age and gender of the children under their care. The interview questions were:

1. Can you please tell me what it was like for you and the children when their father first went to prison? What were some of the challenges and how did you manage them?
2. What, if any challenges, are you still experiencing?
3. What strategies have you used to deal with these challenges? What has worked? What hasn't? (e.g., support, advice, financial assistance, family)
4. What have been some of the major challenges for the children?
5. What strategies, if any, have the children used? What has worked? What hasn't?
6. Where has support come from? Where would you like more support?
7. What could be done in prisons or in the community to reduce problems for families?
8. Do you have any concerns about the children as a consequence of the father's imprisonment?
9. Are there any current problems that are arising with the children? (e.g., certain age, gender etc.)
10. Have you made plans for when the father is released? (e.g., living arrangements, contact/custody arrangements etc.)
11. Do you think problems will increase or decrease when the father is released from prison? Why?
12. Other comments/issues you would like to talk about?

2.2.3 *Procedure*

The lead researcher and a senior research assistant conducted an initial visit to the community for three days in August 2010. The purpose of this visit was to introduce the research team to Elders in the community as well as State Government officials and Council staff, as well as staff working in various community organisations. Prior to this visit, colleagues who were already working in the community requested permission for us to enter the community. The initial visit occurred once this permission was granted. The visit also provided an important opportunity to talk to Elders in the community about the research, to seek support for the study and to assist in telling other women in the community about the research and the eligibility criteria for participation. Two respected female Elders in the community offered to help recruit caregivers to participate in the study. While in the community we had the opportunity to participate in a yarning circle with five Aboriginal women in the community where they shared their stories about their childhood, removal from their parents, becoming parents themselves and the role of family members in the community today. Our time with these women facilitated our understanding of the community; its history, their culture and values, and the kind of support that they believe is currently needed for families in the community. We also shared a meal with a family in the community where we were taught some local language and learned more about the local culture. This trip was imperative to building relationships and to obtaining support for the research.

While in the community we took the opportunity to show two Elders the survey and semi-structured interviews that we had constructed. Both women approved the materials, although noted that some women may choose not to answer all the questions. As the lead researcher was about to take extended leave it was made clear to all the community members that we met with that the lead researcher would not be present on future trips but that the senior research assistant would return to conduct the research.

A second trip to the community occurred in November 2010 for the purpose of commencing interviews. A message was sent to the Elders who had offered their assistance to let them know of the next visit and to begin to talk to women who were caring for a child with a father in prison and invite them to participate in the study. The senior research assistant travelled to the community along with another research assistant. Unfortunately, an incident occurred in the community on the morning of their arrival and the community was essentially closed down for the remainder of the week. The research assistants were able to talk to the Elders but were informed that no one was available to participate that week. The research assistants used the opportunity to talk with workers in the community and for the second research assistant to meet with the key people in the community.

A third trip was conducted at the beginning of December 2010. Unfortunately at the last minute the senior research assistant fell ill and was unable to travel. The research assistant from the previous visit conducted the interviews and another research assistant accompanied her, although did not conduct any interviews. The Elders in the community helped to recruit six women to participate in the study. In all but one interview an Aboriginal Elder was present for at least part of the interview to provide support to the women and to assist with any translation that was required as the women spoke varying degrees of English. Upon commencing the interviews it became apparent that the women did not want to complete the survey nor necessarily answer each of the questions from the semi-structured interview. Although the general framework was adhered to, some women chose to tell their own story while remaining within the theme of the research. Furthermore, some of the interviews were quite short as the women were somewhat reluctant to talk about private family business and for some women English was also a barrier to lengthy communication. Interview times varied from 15 minutes to approximately 45 minutes.

Participants could choose the location of the interview. Interviews were conducted at the participant's workplace in one instance, in the participant's front yard in three instances, and in a car outside the participant's house in two instances. Interviews were not recorded but detailed notes were taken during the interview and expanded upon within 24 hours of the interview. All participants signed consent forms and the study received approval from Griffith University's Human Research Ethics Committee (CCJ/12/10/HREC). Each participant was provided with a $30 voucher to use at their local store to thank them for their time with us. The store sells food and other general items, but not alcohol. A subsequent trip to the community was not conducted, as the researchers were uncertain whether more women would like to participate in the study. As travel to the community was reasonably expensive it was not possible to justify the additional expense within the project budget. It was not possible to conduct further research in another community within the budget and timeframes of the project, given the time that it takes to build relationships and trust in communities.

Given that there were only six participants, it was unnecessary to use a coding scheme as per Study 2. Rather, the lead researcher read the interviews for common themes and ultimately organised the content around four themes: (1) Prior paternal imprisonment; (2) The interpersonal relationship between the caregiver and the imprisoned father; (3) Contact between the child and their father in prison; and (4) Extended family and community support. These corresponded closely to the original research questions contained in the study and from where the interview questions were derived. The women did not participate in lengthy

interviews and therefore additional themes did not emerge. Individual caregivers are identified with simple participant numbers (C1, C2 etc.).

CHAPTER 3. STUDY 1 RESULTS

3.1 Descriptive Statistics: Children with Imprisoned Fathers

Fathers reported a total of 129 children under the age of 18. Just over half (53.3%) of the children were male. Children's ages ranged from one month to seventeen years, with a median of nine years (M = 8.63, SD = 5.29). Participants identified 70.5% of children as being of Aboriginal descent, 3.1% children as being of Torres Strait Islander descent, 24.8% children as being of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent and two children as being of neither Aboriginal nor Torres Strait Islander descent. More than two thirds (68.1%) of children had experienced a previous episode of paternal incarceration. The number of times a child had experienced a previous episode of paternal incarceration ranged from 0 to 10, with a median of one prior episode (M = 2.13, SD = 2.60). Including the current episode up until the interview date, the cumulative time children had experienced with a father in prison ranged from 1- 172 months, with a median of 28 months (M = 44.35, SD = 41.04).

In 75% of cases children were being cared for by their biological mother. Other caregivers included the child's grandparents (11.7%), their step-mother (3.1%), other relatives (4.7%), and the Department of Child Safety (5.5%). Just under half (44.9%) of the children had been living with their father prior to his incarceration. The remaining participants reported having joint visitation rights with 23.6% of the children, limited visitation rights with 14.2% of children and no visitation rights with 11.0% of children. An additional 6.3% of children had been born during their father's imprisonment.

3.2 In What Capacity Are Indigenous Men Able to Engage in Parenting from Prison?

This section outlines different levels and forms of parental engagement for fathers prior to their imprisonment and how this relates to their own upbringing, fathers' perceptions of their cultural engagement and role modeling prior to and during their imprisonment and examines the extent to which fathers engage in parenting practices or are kept informed about their children during their imprisonment.

3.2.1 *Parenting prior to incarceration*

Almost half (42.1%) of the participants grew up without their own father present and 25.7% were raised with harsh or abusive parenting styles (e.g., receiving physical punishments from caregivers). Almost three quarters (71.4%) of participants reported using the same parenting style that their own caregiver had used with them during their childhood.

Sixty-five percent of participants reported being involved in disciplining their own children prior to their imprisonment. Eighty percent of participants reported playing and interacting regularly with their children prior to their incarceration. However, only 22.6% reported being involved with their children's day-to-day care. Examples included being involved in meal preparation or feeding young children, changing nappies, bathing children or taking them to school. One participant (P4) described not having the opportunity to learn parenting behaviours from his own parents as he was removed from their care at a young age. He described having identity problems as a result of being removed from his family.

> [P4] stated that his father [was not] around and that as soon as his mother "had me in [town name withheld]" that he was "taken from my mum and put in 'baby quarters'…I had to suckle from someone else". He went on further to say that once he had been "weaned off" that they (the children in the 'baby quarters') would be "moved on to school where someone would teach us basic hygiene". This included how to "clean themselves, be toilet trained". After this he was "moved into a boys' home and had to look after ourselves". After he was removed from his mother's care as a baby he found out at a later time that she had "moved out of [town name withheld] and I didn't even know… I had brothers and sisters there [town name withheld] and didn't even get to see them". He reported that his mother "came back one day and took my brother [from the boys home] but wasn't allowed to take me [did not know why]". He said that he felt a lot of anger and resentment about this and "you don't know who you are… if you are accepted or not… no identity… that's why I tell my kids to look out for each other". With respect to what sort of parenting involvement he is able to have with his children now he reported that he tries to stay up to date with how they are going at school. When he speaks to them on the phone he would ask them "'how you going with arithmetic?'… Most of the time they [kids] say good and stuff but if they're not sure I tell them to stay behind in class when the other kids go and ask the teacher for help".

Another father of five (P20) described being involved with his children prior to his imprisonment in terms of caring for them and playing with them, but discussed lacking effective discipline techniques.

> [P20] said he was involved in caring for his children before going to prison. He would play football with them every afternoon. He would go to bowls on Saturday night and football on Saturday. He said that he would often take them fishing. [P20] said that he had promised never to hit his children and that he never did. He said that he would raise his voice and would know that they were listening. He said that he had never laid the foundation or ground rules. His younger son who is 8 years old would push boundaries. He said that instead of not listening he would start asking, "…I tell him off a fair bit".

The same participant completed the Triple P, Positive Parenting Program during his imprisonment and reported that he learnt numerous new parenting techniques and, with support from his partner, was able to implement them effectively.

[P20] said he learnt not to "…parent without explaining why…learnt a lot of things…things I learnt were phenomenal, learn about ground rules". He stated that he asked himself "why is it different for one [or another child]…I have to ask myself questions [about my parenting style]…should stick by my values". [P20] said that prior to coming to prison he did not take any notice of his partner's parenting style however that changed when he started doing the Triple P. He realised that many of the techniques and strategies he was learning, his partner was already doing them. "We respect each other. We don't undermine each other, we support… 110% support regardless… never looked at it till Triple P. No-one perfect parent, I'm learning to acknowledge them, I praise them. Never used to. Lots of things I do different, same as my missus does. Asked her if she did parenting course 'cause you do what's in this book… continually conversing with them [the children]".

The same participant indicated that he had been brought up with a father who used harsh parenting techniques and stated that he has made an effort to not follow the same parenting style with his own children.

[P20] said that he does not following the same parenting style as his father, "…if what happened to me and brothers and cousins… put it this way, you can only improve, if you improve on what you experience… father brought us up the way he was brought up, thank god we have laws to stop that". [P20] said that he does not drink in front of his children or swear at them. He said he never raises his voice or gets physical with them.

3.2.2 *Cultural engagement and role modeling*

The majority of fathers reported that they had either been engaged with their children on a cultural level prior to their imprisonment (60%) or that they intended to after their release (20%). Cultural practices included passing on traditional education and knowledge to their children and teaching them how to respect community Elders, as well as teaching them corroboree and dance, painting, hunting, fishing and other traditional food practices. For example,

[P13] explained that he often took his children out hunting and collecting bush tucker. He taught them how to "dot paint" and make artifacts. He would show them where the waterholes were that were safe to drink from. He taught them the sacred sites and would sit down and tell them dreamtime stories.

[P25] stated that his parenting was the same as his father's. His father would take him hunting and taught him to build, as he was a qualified carpenter. He would teach him traditional ways and respect. He said that is how he teaches his children now, to respect Elders.

Most (68.3%) fathers still considered themselves to be a role model to their children or intended to be after their release (14.6%). Fathers' perceptions of what being a role model meant varied but often included abstaining from drugs and alcohol, not engaging in criminal

activity, going to work and teaching cultural practices. One father (P2) whose son was born during his imprisonment discussed how he believed he could be a role model upon his release. P2's son lives with P2's own mother who facilitates regular contact and keeps him up to date with all aspects of his son's life.

> [P2] would let him know that he loves him [his son]… "I'll teach him right from wrong… tell him to be his own person and run his own race… I'm not gonna wrap him up in cotton wool 'cause he needs to know what's appropriate for himself… he needs to have a good mindset of the world and know that it's not all doom and gloom". The participant stated that he knew he missed out on a lot "of cultural things that dads and sons should do together 'cause he wasn't around…but I knew my mum loved me and she did her best". He said that his own father had gone through "rite of passage with Aboriginal law 'cause he was pretty bad". Further, he reported that his own father was from [town name withheld] and he wants to pass down "the Aboriginal culture but only if my son wants to…I have experienced both the urban and community culture but it's up to my boy how he wants to establish his identity'.

Despite lacking parental figures in his own life, P4 (discussed earlier) still believes that he is a role model to his children and that he can guide them on the right path, both morally and spiritually.

> [P4] reported that he does see himself as a role model to his children now in many ways. He said that he "wants them [his children] to go onto bigger and better things… the only way to do it is to educate yourself… keep your body in good nick to get you there". Further, he "doesn't want them to tread on landmines that I tread on [get into trouble]". Since he has been in prison he reported that he "keeps pushing them to work hard". In relation to spirituality, he said that he believes "once people go they're gone but they are still here… their strength is still there… you have to harness that and pass it onto your kids". The participant reported that he is "a very spiritual person" and that it is very important to pass that onto his own children and "instill it into the family network… it sprouts and strengthens". He stated that he passes this onto his children via phone conversations.

3.2.3 *Current parental involvement*

Forty-one percent of fathers reported that they participated in parenting (e.g., being involved with decision making) with at least one of their children during their imprisonment. For example, P38 reported that his son's mother (caregiver), his sister and he converse together on speaker phone to discuss issues relating to his son as well as speaking with his son and asking him "not to be bad". More than half (61.5%) of the participants discussed keeping up to date with their children's lives. This included discussing the wellbeing of their children, and school or other activities with either the child or caregiver. Almost one quarter (24.4%) of participants reported that although they had little or no contact with their children,

they received information about them through family, kinship or community members (both in prison and in the community). For example,

> [P15] reported that he has not had any contact with his children during his current prison episode, as their mother [would not] let them speak to him. When asked if he is able to find out information about his children by other means he stated that he asks his uncle to pass on messages to his kids that 'dad loves them'. He said that his uncle tells him what he knows about the kids but that 'it's not a lot though'.

3.3 What is the Degree and Quality of Contact That Indigenous Men Have with Their Children While in Prison?

3.3.1 *Father-child contact*

Only 22% of participants reported receiving visits from their children since their imprisonment. However, the majority (65.9%) had phone contact with their children. Only five (12.2%) participants reported that they had spoken to their children through video-conferencing. The majority (57.6%) of fathers did not have any letter contact with their children. Almost half (46.3%) of the fathers reported having no contact with at least one child. In addition, five of these participants also reported believing that their relationship was satisfactory. One father (P1) whose three-month-old son was born during his imprisonment illustrated the value of having regular contact.

> [P1] has received visits from his son every week. When his son visits he reported [that] "me boy looks up and smiles hey Miss… since he was birthed he recognises me and me voice". He reported that he just spends a lot of time cuddling his son when he visits and that this sort of physical contact is not restricted. When asked what would be the best way to have a visit with his son he stated that they are only allowed one visit per week "and it only goes for one hour hey… it would be better if two hours". The participant also calls his partner everyday "it pretty much eases me mind hey to know they're alright and safe". He does not write or receive any letters "cause we talk all the time and I see 'em heaps". However he does receives pictures of his son approximately every two months.

One father of eight children to either three or four different mothers discussed the challenges of maintaining relationships with his children during his imprisonment. P19 had only received visits from the daughter of his current partner. With his other children he maintains contact through phone calls and letters but raised concerns about the effectiveness of these forms of communication and the problems associated with restricted physical contact.

> [P19] said that being in prison has changed his relationship [with his children]. "Trying to talk on phone or letter, trying to write adult words and have them understand big words… [They are] too

young, not listening… not having their full attention". [P19] stresses about his partner so his relationship with his children suffers. He thinks his children can be reluctant to communicate with him. Prior to being in prison, even though he was depressed and had alcohol problems, his children would still come to him… [P19] said that he likes to write [to his children], "…makes me feel close. He personally addresses each of his children's issues when he writes to them. He said that he tries to get them to open up to him… He said that physical contact restrictions affected his relationship with his children. "Children need to be given love and affection, to deny them that is inhumane…lose the intimate relationship with child in prison. I think it's important to talk about intimate things with children, finding new ways to adapt, especially with girls".

One father of five (P7) described how his relationship with his children had changed because of the lack of physical contact since his imprisonment.

[P7 stated] that his relationship with his children has definitely changed since he has been in prison. He has had no visits however he talks to them on the phone, although he stated that they don't have "the same interactions". [P7] stated that [he] could "hear in their voices that they miss you", and that they missed his physical presence.

Another father of five (P26), who has only had visits from his youngest child (three year old daughter) because he does not want his children to become comfortable visiting prison, also discussed problems associated with restricted contact visits.

[P26] believes that not having physical contact with children affects them greatly especially for him, "…we're very close. To have a law like that questions why it should be in place. It affects us big time… we're a tight knit family, there's lots of love...it's hard for wife and kids".

One father of three teenage boys to two different mothers (P13) did not receive any visits from his sons because they live too far away. He described the emotional experience of having a videoconference with one of his sons and other members of his family in the previous year. The videoconference was the only contact P13 had had with his family during his imprisonment as he does not have addresses or phone numbers for any of them.

[P13] has had no visits from his children since he has been in prison. He has had one video-link with his family, "…had video-link last year, was good, we all started to cry. Was so happy for weeks and weeks after then everything just gone…I still got them in my heart". "We all had tears. Happy, then time to go…they were very sad…I tried to look happy but inside…" He does not hear anything about them or what is happening in their lives.

3.3.2 *Quality of prison visits*

When asked what would be the best way to have visits the most common response (29%) was that there should be more children's resources (e.g., games and toys, books and

playgrounds) made available to allow fathers to play and interact with their children. For example,

> [P2] When asked what he did with his son during visits he replied 'nothing.. there's nothing to do'. There are no toys or books to play with. They did build a new play area 'but they locked it up and knocked it on the head'. The participant thinks that this may only be due to the recent renovations but is not sure. The participant reported that he uses 'a toilet roll to play catch or footy with him…he just wants to be amused…I don't care what the screws say I just want my boy to be happy…we just muck around'. In relation to what would be the best way to have a visit with his son he reported that there should be toys and the play area should be opened up. He also stated that they used to be able to have visits photos taken 'but they don't even do this anymore cause there aren't enough recreational officers available…so they say'.

> [P19] believes the best way to have visits with your children in is a private but open room 'to see in'. Visits would be best in open air with television to make it feel like home. He would like to have jigsaws, pens and paper so they could do drawings together that children could take home.

Other suggestions for visits included more frequent and/or longer visiting periods (12.2%), having family days with barbeques (12.2%), having visits outside in the open (22.0%), eating food together (14.6%), and having family photos taken (2.4%), having more privacy (12.2%). For example,

> [P26] would like to have visits with his children like they have visits on the farm (LGCC Farm). He would like to have BBQs and swings with a playground. He said the visits on the farm are "excellent… things are easier, not much pressure…fresh air, open space and the time is long enough".

3.3.3 *Problems maintaining relationships due to reduced opportunities for quality contact*

Almost two thirds (63.4%) of fathers reported problems maintaining a relationship with at least one of their children. Four themes emerged that illustrated the pattern of relationships since the beginning of the participants' incarceration period. Relationships either remained negative (17.1%), remained positive (31.7%), changed in positive ways (4.9%) or changed in negative ways (46.3%). These patterns appear to be related to the degree and quality of contact participants had with their children during their imprisonment. As noted earlier, some fathers had no concerns about the quality of their relationship with their children despite not having any contact with them during their imprisonment. For example, one father of three teenagers (P15) has had no contact with any of his children during his imprisonment and is unsure of whether they are aware he is in prison. Despite the

lack of contact, P15 did not believe that his relationship with his children had changed and that they "loved him very much".

One father of two daughters to two different mothers described disparate patterns of relationships with each of his children. P6 remains in regular contact with his youngest daughter and reported that his relationship with her has grown stronger since his imprisonment. In contrast, P6 was unable to describe the quality of his relationship with his eldest daughter due to the lack of contact since his imprisonment due to restrictions put in place by her mother.

> When enquired as to what his relationship was like with his daughters prior to his sentence [P6] replied that it was "pretty good" with both of his children but that he had "a lot more contact" with his youngest daughter. He said that after his eldest daughter moved away with her mother that their relationship was still "good" but they only had limited contact via phone conversations. The participant stated that he believes that since his incarceration his relationship with his youngest daughter is "a bit closer… sometimes you take people for granted… makes you have a good look and see what you got… the importance of my daughter… you don't realise until you aren't always there". In relation to whether his relationship with his eldest daughter he reported that he is unaware of what their relationship would be like now and whether it would have changed. His ex-partner (her mother) did not want him to have contact with his daughter whilst he was in prison.

P13, who was discussed earlier as having no contact with his three sons apart from one videoconference with one of his son's in the previous year, discussed how lack of contact has impacted on his relationship with his children.

> [P13 stated that] his relationship with his sons has changed since he was in prison. He stated that he has "lost everything". His sons were close to himself and his younger brother. His younger brother has since passed away. He said he is "…missing out on his sons and they are missing out on me".

3.4 What Barriers Do Indigenous Fathers Experience in Maintaining Relationships and Parenting While in Prison?

This section outlines some of the barriers to maintaining relationships and parenting while a father is incarcerated. These include problems associated with maintaining contact with children and families, fathers' concerns about the psychological impact of visits, the impact of repeat imprisonment on relationships and the association between father-caregiver relationships and father-child relationships.

3.4.1 *Problems associated with maintaining contact*

As noted earlier, only 22% of participants received visits from their children. Sixteen (41.0%) participants reported that they did not want visits from their children and another

sixteen cited cost and/or distance as the primary reason families did not visit or visits were limited. Four participants cited problems with their child's caregiver as a reason for receiving limited or no visits from their children. However, 17.1% of participants reported that caregivers restricted contact (including phone calls) with at least one of their children. Only three participants reported that they did not have any problems with their current visiting arrangements. Although few fathers received visits, the majority (65.9%) had some phone contact with their children. Ten (30.3%) participants reported not having any problems with phone contact. However, as with visits, 39.4% fathers cited the high costs as the main problem with maintaining regular contact through phone calls. Three participants noted the difficulties of having a seven-minute limit on phone calls. Only one participant stated that he did not want to have phone contact with his children. Although the majority (57.6%) of fathers did not have any letter contact with their children, only four participants reported problems with letter contact. Of these participants, three reported that problems with the caregiver or not knowing the caregiver's address prevented letter contact and one participant reported that the cost of envelopes prevented regular letter contact with his children.

One father of four (P10) illustrates how financial restraints limit regular contact with families, particularly when families live in remote communities. P10 has had no visits from his children and mainly keeps in touch with his children through other prisoners from the same community.

> [P10] stated, "…if I'm lucky I get to talk to them on the phone every now and then". He said that it was good talking to them on the phone however it was 'only seven minutes' so you "can't really have much of a conversation". [P10] said that the distance of prison from [town name withheld] is a problem. Money and travel were obstacles that prevented him from getting visits. It costs $30 for the ferry to the mainland and then it costs money at both ends of the trip to get a taxi home or a bus to the prison. [P10] stated that there should be "someone outside to spare their time to help the brothers in here… pick up women and children to visit them". [P10] stated that videoconferencing facilities should be provided free to prisoners and their families.

Another father (P26) stated that limited money and time restrictions prevent him from having regular and quality contact with his children.

> [P26] said there is never enough time on visits and there is only one phone in the unit. The phone calls should be five minutes longer and they are too expensive, "…shouldn't be $1.00 in 1 ½ minute…chews too much money. [P26] said it is difficult to maintain contact with the wage they are paid in prison. "When I'm here I budget and stretch what I have, that's my rule". He said that he does not want his wife to have that stress (of putting money in his trust account). He said that she has enough to do with "mothering". He is going to work fulltime in prison so he can send money home for parks and swimming.

3.4.2 *Psychological impact of visits*

As noted earlier, 41.0% participants reported that they did not want visits from their children. These fathers cited various reasons for not wanting their children to visit them including the emotional difficulties of visits, the trauma associated with visiting a prison and concerns of normalising the prison environment. One participant (P17) discussed not wanting his daughter to visit him due to the emotional difficulties.

> [P17] stated that he did not want his daughter to come and see him in a "place like this" and that he did not want her to "…see me like that…see, my life is separated". He did not want her to see him get emotional.

Another participant (P2) also raised concerns about the emotional difficulties of visits. Although he now has regular visits from his son, P2 has had concerns about the psychological impact of visits since he was first incarcerated.

> [P2] receives visits from his mother and son every week. When his mother first started bringing his son to the prison the participant asked her not to bring his son in every week because he was concerned about how the visit would affect his son... "But I spoke to a mate in here and he said I should keep seeing my boy… I called mum and she said that my son is fine when he gets home after visits so she can keep bringing him in". The participant stated that his son is a little bit upset when he first comes into the visit room but as soon as he sees his dad "he is smiling, happy and his eyes light up". He reported that his son is not frightened of all of the security "as he has sort of grown up with it and knows the routine". The only time his son does get upset is when it is time to leave "he always knows when he has to go and he frets a bit".

One participant (P7) who also had not had any visits from his four children during his imprisonment reported that he was concerned about the trauma associated with visiting their father in prison.

> [P7] has had no visits at the prison from his children because he "...can't stand the thought of bringing them here, and that you wouldn't want them to see how we live here". [P7] stated that he thought that if his children saw him in prison that it would have a traumatic effect on them, especially seeing the razor wire. He said his son "...would say 'wow'" but his daughter would be frightened. He said that his sons would "...want to be here" and that they would think it was cool "...is deadly" but that it isn't once you are here. [P7] stated that "...not a day goes by that I'm not thinking of them". He said that they are your babies from day one.

One father (P4) who has spent almost the entirety of his two teenagers' lives in prison expressed concerns of disrupting his children's lives with regular contact during his imprisonment.

[P4] reported that his children have visited him during his time in prison. He said that they would visit "maybe once a year". He stated that distance and money were the reasons for this. His children live in [town name withheld] so he does not want them to waste money to go and see him. "The kids want to but I don't want them to". He does call his children a couple of times every week "we're always on the phone". He said that he finds this experience "good" but that he will "only ask how they're goin'…I won't ask them how they feel about me in here…don't want to burden them…just want them to go to school with a healthy mind not with a ton of bricks on their head". He stated that he does not like them to think about the fact that he is in prison as it's "not a nice thing for them to think about". He also writes his children letters "sometimes" but tells them "don't write back unless you want to". A video linkup is arranged for him to talk to his children every 3-6 months "like on holidays or at Christmas… when I feel the need to".

P10, who was discussed earlier as citing distance and cost as one of the main reasons for not receiving visits from his children, also stated that he did not want his children to visit him due to concerns that prison would be somewhat normalised.

[P10] stated that he did not want his children visiting him in prison and that he had told them not to come and visit him while he is in jail. He believes that they will "get idea" about come into jail. He stated that "other fella's" tell them what [it is] like and that young people these days encourage one another to "get here".

3.4.3 *Repeat imprisonment*

As noted earlier, all but three participants had served a prior prison sentence (92.1%), and more than two thirds (68.6%) of children had experienced a previous episode of paternal incarceration. One father of four (P32) had been in prison on eight prior occasions. Although he reported that his relationship with his youngest child remained positive, he attributed this to her only being a couple of months old at the time of his incarceration and reported that she was too young to understand prison. Moreover, P32 had regular contact with this child during his imprisonment. P32's eldest three children are to a different biological mother and he has had no contact with them since his imprisonment. He discussed how his being in and out of prison had impacted on the quality of relationship with his three eldest children and described the shame he experienced as a consequence.

[P32] reported that his youngest child (one year old daughter with current partner) knows that he isn't living at home and has visited him in prison but that she is too young to understand what's going on. His three older children all know that he is in prison. "Yeah…they know about jail…I've been in and out before". He said that "family" would [have] told the children about his current sentence. When he was asked what "family" told them he said "probably their mum". When asked what his relationship with his children was like prior to his imprisonment he said it was good with his youngest daughter. 'She was only like a couple of months old so it was just good'. However, he said that it was "not very

good" with his eldest three children. When he was asked why he felt this way he said "I'm ashamed of myself for coming in here… feel bad for my family… they don't like seeing me in jail". He said that he felt that he had let his eldest three children down "too many times" because "It's like I'm always in and out of here". He did say that prior to his current sentence that he would still visit them in [town name withheld] when he could. "When I'd get a chance I'd go and see them". He also said that when he wasn't able to see his eldest three children he would call them all the time. "Good to talk to them on the phone… good to hear from them… see what they up to and that". When asked whether he believed his relationship with his children may have changed during his imprisonment he said that it hadn't with his youngest daughter. However, with his three older children he said it probably has. The participant has not spoken to his three older children since his imprisonment but said "I've let them down again". This was in relation to being sent back to prison.

3.4.4 *Perceived negative impact of incarceration on children*

More than half (56.1%) of participants reported that they believed their incarceration had a negative impact on their children's lives and 14.6% were unsure, primarily due to the limited contact they had with their children. Fathers reported various problems that their children were facing as a consequence of their imprisonment. These included experiencing shame, being bullied, behavioural problems, substance use, emotional difficulties, academic problems, and growing up without a father figure. For example, one participant (P12) raised concerns about the impact his imprisonment has on his daughter's education, her being bullied and their relationship. P12 had been in prison for approximately ten years and, although they had regular phone contact, his daughter had only sporadically visited in the previous couple of years.

> [P12] believes that being inside has "definitely" changed his child's life. Her mother is not educating her or helping her with spelling and reading. The fact that he is not around doing the things that the man of the house needs to attend to is having an effect on her. He said that she obviously misses him and she keeps asking her mother when she will see her dad again. [P12] stated that the longer the stretch, the further the loss of contact gets away. He stated that when he does see his daughter it is still comforting. He believes that prison has made them strangers and not freely spoken the way children should speak. [P12] believes it [is] like the children are in a prison themselves... [P12] stated that children can often be nasty to his daughter and that she has experienced shame about him being in prison. Other children ask her where her dad is. Because a few of her friends are European children she is embarrassed about the fact he is in prison. She is also stressed because [P12] is not there to help her with homework. She is also confused about her mother's boyfriends telling her what to do because they [are not] her father.

Another participant (P23) raised concerns about his children's behavioural problems, alcohol use and being bullied. Although P23 was only serving a short sentence, he also

served four prior sentences. P23 also had not received any visits during his two month sentence but did maintain regular contact over the phone.

> [P23] believes being in prison has changed his children's life because he has not been there for them. He said that one of his children is an alcoholic and another is "…ready to go to juvie [juvenile detention]". Another one of his children has a good job but drink's a lot according to [P23]; "…right now everything is mixed up…kids all separated, they all wanna come my way". He said that two of his children do not go to school because they get bullied while another one is a bully at school. He said that there has to be change in relation to this. "Everyone [has] gone haywire since I been inside…missus only talks, won't smack them but I cop it over the phone".

Another participant (P33) also raised concerns about his children's behaviour since his incarceration but also noted the shame his children experience of having a father in prison. P33 had been in prison for almost two years and had three prior sentences. He was only in contact with two of his seven children, who were under the care of DCS.

> [P33] stated that his children have had problems since his incarceration. His children are not going to school and their mother won't make them. He also states that it has had an effect on their behaviour; they [will not] listen to their mother. They are swearing at their mother, getting in trouble at school, feel shamed and embarrassed, question their mothers' authority, and get into fights with other kids because he is inside.

P4 who was discussed earlier as having been removed from his parents' care as a young child expressed concerns about his own children growing up without a father figure. P4 did however report that he felt as though he was with his children on a spiritual level.

> [P4] did state that not having a "father figure" may have affected them. "Seeing other fellas [kids] walking and talking with their fathers and saying stuff like 'Dad, don't do that' [in relation to a father and child playing around]…kids might go home 'cause they don't want to see it… but I tell them I'm there spiritually". The participant [reported] that he "never blamed my own mother" but "has told my kids about what I went through…the things I was up against…so my kids are pretty clicked on…I always instill pride and strength in them. They live in a community where there is nothing to do…it's a tough community…drugs, alcohol, violence…but they're doing really well".

3.4.5 *Father-caregiver relationships*

Similar to fathers' reports of problems maintaining relationships with children, 65.9% of participants reported having problems with at least one of the mothers of their children. Although only four fathers cited problems with the caregiver as a reason for limited visits with their children, 17.1% believed that the caregiver was restricting contact with their children. In addition, 12.2% of fathers reported not knowing how to contact their children or

the caregiver (e.g., either had no address of phone number for them). Moreover, 14.6% of fathers discussed difficulties maintaining relationships with children due to problems with the caregiver. Thus, it was evident that when fathers were not maintaining a relationship with the mother of their child, they were less likely to have contact with the child. One father of six children (P25) has had no contact with either his children or their caregiver during his imprisonment.

> [P25] said that he was not with the children's mother any longer and she refuses to bring them to the prison for visits. He said that his own sister would if they had a chance but he said he hasn't asked them. [P25] said that because of transport it would be too much of a burden to ask them to. He said they have enough going on in their lives.

Another father (P5) reported having a three-year-old daughter whom he has never met. He reported that his daughter was born during a previous prison sentence and that although he knew she was in hospital somewhere he had no way of contacting the caregiver to obtain more information.

> [P5] stated that his daughter does "not know much about me at all". He has never met his daughter as she was born whilst he was serving a previous prison sentence… the last that the participant was aware of was that his daughter was in hospital in Brisbane and lives there [in Brisbane] due to medical problems. According to the participant, his daughter "couldn't eat and had a tube to give her food". His daughter "doesn't know him or what I look like". Thus, no further information was available about his relationship with his daughter.

Despite having never had contact with his daughter, P5 discussed wanting to be involved in his daughter's life and providing for her financially upon release. Another father discussed having problems with an unknown number of the caregivers to his children. P9 reported having 16 children in total to 13 different mothers, but could only recount the details of nine of these children and thus the other seven were not included in this study. P9 reported only having a couple of visits from one of his daughters during his imprisonment. Although he stated that he did not want his children to visit him, he also reported that some of his children have not visited because of problems with their mothers.

3.5 What Can Be Done to Better Support Indigenous Fathers in Prison?

Only two participants had attended a parenting program during their imprisonment and both participants stated that they found the program useful. Just over half (51.3%) of the participants stated that they would find a prison-based parenting program useful if one were offered. Fathers made numerous suggestions as to what a prison-based parenting program

could cover. These included teaching fathers how to emotionally connect and communicate with children, teaching them about drug and alcohol abuse and mental and physical abuse, how to abstain from criminal activity, how to deal with children being bullied, how to budget and financially maintain contact, how to be a responsible parent, how to facilitate their children's education and encourage work ethics, how to instill cultural values, how to raise children of different age groups, and how to provide for children's basic needs (e.g., children's health, cooking, feeding babies and changing nappies). In addition, 39.4% of participants stated that they would find a post-release program useful. When asked what type of post-release program would be useful, all but one participant stated that a program relating to parenting and relationships would be most beneficial, while the remaining one participant suggested that a program relating to accommodation and budgeting assistance would be most useful. The following excerpts illustrate the eagerness of many fathers in this study to engage in parenting programs, whether prison- or community-based.

> [P10] was unaware of any parenting programs available in prison. He does think that there should be programs available and that he would attend… [P10 stated that] dads in prison need to learn basic things like; educate on being a father, budgeting, on how to support one another, how to put food on the table, how to be a good father. They need to educate children about life if they want children to look up to them. They need to be taught how to be a good role model. They also need to be educated by an elder that is a parent himself. He thought that the program could include having their children come in as part of the program process. He stated that he would like parenting support on the outside to help him "…better myself to be a better father…if someone available to talk about this, I'm there"… He stated that he believed parenting programs should be based in the community. They should put notices up about courses. [P10] believes that "…young fella's would come and older fella's would come and help". He stated that the older men would come because it could be their sons or cousins going inside. [P10] stated that [you are] better off outside than inside. He also believes that these programs could combine with the Men's Group [town name withheld] and also in rehabilitation programs.

> [P9] was unaware of any parenting programs available in prison but he believed a parenting program would be useful. A good program would teach fathers how to be emotional and show them how they have let down their children. It would show them how to make a better life and save money. Teach them about drugs and alcohol and about mental and physical abuse, which he said was very damaging to children-to them, and around them.

> In regard to parenting programs, [P20] said that often there was "…no practice in what they preach". Parenting programs should teach "…in a way that abides by today's laws, if you come in [with the] mentality that because you were flogged up, children should be [flogged up]". He said that parents need to admit when they are not a good parent. [P20] believes that programs help with domestic violence issues and also when you are lodging a parole application. He said that he is "…always hands up for improvement…if I can change the way I have my relationships"… [P20] said he will be living

with his family upon release from prison. He would be interested in doing more Triple P (he had previously completed the program and found it very useful) or contacting Relationships Australia for relationship advice… "If I can learn anything that is in my backyard, I'll do it". He said he would even do courses that he may not personally need but if he does participate he can influence and teach others.

3.6 Summary of Findings

Overall, it was evident that many men found it difficult to be involved as a father from prison. However, parental involvement was rarely high prior to imprisonment, with only half of the children living with their father prior to his imprisonment and less than a quarter of men reporting being involved in the day-to-day care of their children. Opportunities to learn about being a father appeared to be limited, with almost half of the men reporting that they grew up without their father present. A further quarter of men described experiencing harsh or abusive parenting. Importantly, half of the men interviewed expressed the desire to participate in a parenting program while in prison and 40% of men reported that they would also like to be offered a post-release program to support them in various aspects of parenting and maintaining relationships with children and caregivers. The quality of men's relationships with their children while imprisoned was related to the opportunities that they had for contact with their children. The major barriers to men maintaining a relationship with their children were the distances that families needed to travel to visit, the expense of travel and accommodation and the expense of STD phone calls. For men who did not receive visits and have regular phone or letter contact with children, their imprisonment appeared to create a greater distance between them and their children. Results are discussed further and key recommendations are made in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4. STUDY 2 RESULTS

The findings from the interviews with caregivers are organised around four main themes that emerged through the women's stories. These are: (1) Prior paternal imprisonment; (2) The interpersonal relationship between the caregiver and the imprisoned father; (3) Contact between the child and their father in prison; and (4) Extended family and community support. Although each of these themes is described separately below, they are interconnected.

4.1 Prior Paternal Imprisonment

Three of the six women reported that the father had been in prison prior to the current offence, with the remaining women either not mentioning previous imprisonment or being unsure of prior prison terms. Often women were unsure what offences the prior prison terms were for or how long the father had served in prison. They also tended to be unsure of the length of the current prison term. During the interview with C5 the Indigenous Elder present in the interview stated that the father of the children is "always in prison". Participant C4, who was caring for her granddaughter, indicated that her daughter's partner had been in prison previously but did not know how many times or for what offences. She reported that there was a five or six-year period during which he was not in prison, but that he was drinking during this time.

4.2 Interpersonal Relationship Between the Caregiver and the Imprisoned Father

The relationships between the caregiver and the father in prison reflect the cultural practices in Aboriginal families to care for, and assume parenting roles of, children who are not their biological children but part of their extended family. Only two women were in an intimate relationship with the imprisoned father prior to his imprisonment. Only one of these relationships appeared to be continuing during his imprisonment. Participant C1 indicated that her two eldest children were not the biological children of her partner, but that they consider him to be their father. She also had three younger children that are his biological children. She had been in a relationship with her partner for 10 years at the time of the interview. During his imprisonment she had visited her partner a few times, but the last visit had been in 2005. Although he was released shortly after that visit, he has been in prison

since but she had not visited him. She indicated that travel costs prohibited her from visiting since that time. At the time of her interview the father had been released and completed his parole period. Although she reported that he was taking a more active role in caring for the children and that he takes them fishing regularly, she also indicated that he was using marijuana and that this was causing conflict between them. In the week prior to the interview she and her children had accessed a women's shelter for a week in order to get away from his substance abuse. She was not able to stay with extended family at that time as they had other family members staying with them. The participant appeared to still be in a relationship with her partner and indicated that he is now a changed man, but that she is "better off without him".

Participant C2 had three children with the imprisoned father, the eldest of which was being raised by the participant's mother. The participant indicated that there is no longer violence in the home since her partner was imprisoned and that the children were happy since the father has been in prison. At the time of the interview he had applied for parole and C2 reported that he is "not welcome to return" to reside with the family. However, she acknowledged that he would probably return to the community to live with his parents or other family members.

The remaining caregivers had kinship relationships with either the father in prison or the mother of the child/ren. Three of the caregivers received phone calls from the father for the children in their care or had facilitated a visit with the father. Participant C3, who was caring for two children each with their father in prison, received phone calls from one of the fathers but had no contact with the other father. In fact, she and her partner had formally adopted this father's child. At the time of the interview the child was one year old and unaware of the adoption and that her biological father was in prison. The participant disclosed that she had concerns regarding how to tell the child about this situation.

4.3 Contact Between the Child and Their Imprisoned Father

At the time of the interview, only eight out of the 16 children had any contact with their father during his imprisonment. Only two caregivers had taken the children to visit their father in prison. Participant C1 had taken two of her five children (2 years old and 1 year old at the time) to the prison in 2005, but that the travel costs prevented her from making further visits. The participant reported that the prison was not child-friendly. For example, she indicated that there were no toys for her children to play with during the visit. She accessed a prison transport bus to travel to the prison and reported that the transport was child-friendly

in that she was given access to a baby capsule. She accessed services in her community to assist her with the transport to the prison. In terms of additional costs, she was not happy that she had to bring lunch money when visiting the father in prison and was unsure why she was required to put some money in a box on the prison transport bus.

Participant C6 had also facilitated a visit between the child in her care (approximately 13 years old at the time of the visit) and her father while he was in court the previous year. At this time her father was sentenced to 15 years in prison. The child had also visited her father once in prison, although the details were not discussed. At the time of the interview the participant indicated that she was hoping to take the father's child to see him in a few weeks, but that she was not sure if she would be able to afford it. C6 reported that the child really wants to see her father for Christmas and is excited about seeing him, but also a bit worried and shy. The participant also noted that they don't have enough time with the men when they go the prisons. C6 described how the previous Justice co-ordinator in their community had been a "big support" and had organized the bus to transport her and her family to the prison. However, the community was currently without a replacement co-ordinator and C6 indicated that the community really needed a new co-ordinator who could facilitate transport to the prisons for families. She suggested that there should be a fund that the community can access to assist when they want to visit family members in prison, as many families in the community have these issues. It is apparent that even for families who wish to facilitate visits between the children and their father, that the costs of travel are prohibitive from having regular visits. Rather visits appear to be sporadic or one-off events.

The remaining caregivers had not taken the children to visit their fathers in prison either due to a breakdown in their relationship (C2, C4), because of the prison environment (C3), or they did not mention why visits had not occurred (C5). Participant C3 indicated that she had not taken the children to the prison, as "prison is not a place to take my kids".

Participants C2, C3, C4 and C6 all reported that the children in their care received phone calls from their fathers. Participant C2 reported that the children receive phone calls irregularly and do not receive letters due to the father's poor literacy skills. C3 indicated that one of the children in her care received regular phone calls from her father and reported that she will encourage any contact that the child's father wants to have with the child in the future. C4 reported that her granddaughter receives fortnightly phone calls from her father but that sometimes "my granddaughter does not want to talk to her father when he calls". The child does not receive letters from her father and has not visited him in prison. C6 stated that although the father of the child in her care calls from prison, it is not regular contact due to the costs of phone calls and that the telephone in their home is not always connected. The

Elder who was sitting in on the interview reported that this was generally an issue in the community with families who have someone in prison. Participant C5 indicated that the children have not received any phone calls or letters from their father, nor have they visited him in prison.

It was clear from the interviews that maintaining contact between children and their imprisoned fathers is difficult, with prison visits limited by distance and cost, while telephone calls are expensive and unreliable at times, while letter writing is virtually non-existent and is likely related to the poor literacy of the fathers. Avenues to explore more effective methods of communication and assisting children to maintain or develop a relationship with their father, where desirable, are important.

4.4 Extended Family and Community Support

Most of the women indicated that they received support in caring for the children from extended family members and their community more generally. Participant C1 had accessed services in her community to facilitate a prison visit and had also utilized a women's shelter shortly after her partner's release from prison. She also reported that her extended family supported her when she was abusing alcohol and had contact with the Department of Child Safety in relation to two of her children. She said that "my grandfather was support to me during this time, it help me to stop from drinking". She reported that she was no longer drinking alcohol or using drugs.

During the interview with C2, her mother joined the discussion. She was caring for her daughter's eldest child. She reported that she had received no support from local groups to raise the child. She expressed that the "duties of the father have fallen onto the family like grandparents" and other members of the family to raise the child. She reported that only recently did she start receiving government payments to assist her financially. Participant C3 had not accessed any services. Participant C4, who was caring for her granddaughter, indicated that her family was a great source of support, especially her sisters. She reported that she also receives Centrelink payments. She believed that her granddaughter is "happy while in my care" and revealed that in the past she has cared for up to 10 children at one time. Similarly, C5 reported that most of the support in raising and caring for the children in her care comes from extended family support. She also indicated that the children's teachers know that their father is in prison and understands their needs. Participant C6 cares for her nephew's children as well as two other children that are unrelated to the father in prison. As well as utilizing support from the Justice co-ordinator in the community to access the prison

transport bus, the participant also reported that she received support from her family in the community in raising the child and being able to share concerns.

4.5 Summary of Findings

Caregiver's experiences of caring for a child with a father in prison appeared to exist separately from the correctional system, at least in part due to the distance between the community and the prisons where the fathers were detained. Half of the 16 children in this study had no contact with their father and only three children had visited their father. The cost of phone calls and the difficulty in organising and affording a prison visit was cited as some reasons for such infrequent contact with the children's fathers. Most women viewed it as their role to look after the children when their father was imprisoned, but also indicated that it was a burden shared by relatives and the community more generally. Most of the women reported that they received support of extended family members and others in the community; yet felt that additional services in the community were needed to support families of prisoners. Results are discussed further and key recommendations are made in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

This study gave a voice to Indigenous Australian fathers in prison in North Queensland and in doing so, attempted to understand whether and how family relationships are altered through paternal imprisonment. It also gave a voice to a small number of Indigenous women in a remote Queensland community who were caring for children with a father in prison. It was evident that for some men, imprisonment placed a significant barrier between them and their children while for other men, their relationships with their children were sporadic prior to imprisonment and therefore their absence in the lives of their children may have been less pronounced. However, each father revealed a complex story; their lives shaped by their own childhood experiences of family life, by antisocial behaviour, broken relationships, unemployment, poor education, alcohol and drug abuse, as well as strengths in kinship ties, culture and spirituality. These variations make it difficult to neatly summarise men's experiences of fathering from prison. Similarly, the stories of the caregivers were varied and complex and children's contact with their fathers ranged from regular to non-existent. But what was evident in these women's accounts was the great strength to be drawn from family and community support in an otherwise remote and disadvantaged community. Five broad conclusions are drawn from these studies and will be discussed below. Recommendations are made for improvements to systemic support for Indigenous imprisoned fathers, their children and communities, as well as directions for further research.

5.1 Development of Parenting Skills

The first conclusion is that many men found it difficult to be involved as a father from prison. However, while this difficulty might be exacerbated by the correctional system, parental involvement was rarely high prior to imprisonment. While approximately half of the children were living with their father prior to his imprisonment, less than a quarter of men reported being involved in the day to day care of their children, such as changing nappies, assisting at bath time or taking children to school. Most men reported playing with their children or doing activities such as taking them fishing, although these activities did not necessarily occur on a regular basis. It was clear from many men's accounts that although they wanted to be good fathers and assist their children to grow up and have a better life than their own, they did not really know what to do as fathers.

Almost half of the men grew up without their father present and a quarter of men described experiencing harsh or abusive parenting. Therefore opportunities to learn about being a father were limited, a finding consistent with research on Indigenous fathers (Ball, 2009; Hammond et al., 2004). Some men described actively trying not to be like their own father and although they reported appreciating the role of their mothers, aunts and grandmothers in raising them, they did not necessarily take cues from their female caregiver when they became fathers. Despite this, the majority of men saw themselves as role models in their children's lives in terms of transferring cultural knowledge and encouraging them to work hard and make better decisions than they had. For the two men in the study who participated in parenting programs while in prison, their acquisition of new parenting skills and confidence in approaching fatherhood created opportunities for the men to be involved in their children's lives from prison and to support their partner in parenting.

An interesting finding was that although many men had no regular contact with their children and were not involved in family decision-making, for the most part they felt that their children were doing well. It is unclear why men felt this way. One possibility is that some men felt ashamed that they were not able to be part of their children's lives and possibly did not feel that they had been a good father prior to imprisonment such that their children were no worse off than before imprisonment. Other men may have been confident that their children were being looked after well by their caregivers and in their community. In fact, almost a quarter of men noted that although they did not have direct contact with their children or the caregiver, they received updates about their children from other relatives in prison or from relatives or friends attending visits. Therefore extended community networks and kinship ties were beneficial to many imprisoned fathers. Some men commented that although they couldn't be there physically their children knew that they were with them spiritually. If caregivers and community members echoed this message, in a culture that has strong spiritual beliefs, then it is possible that these sentiments gave both the men and their children some comfort. Further research is needed to understand the framework within which these men understand the wellbeing of their children.

The above findings lead to the second conclusion that there is a very real opportunity to provide better support for Indigenous fathers in prison and to facilitate their development of parenting skills. Half of the men interviewed expressed the desire to participate in a parenting program while in prison and 40% of men reported that they would also like to be offered a post-release program to support them in their reintegration back into the family, to assist their communication with caregivers and help them develop and maintain strong relationships with their children. There was an acknowledgement by fathers that they lacked

some skills they felt were essential to being an involved father, such as showing emotions and communicating with their children. They also wanted to be able to communicate with the caregivers in more effective ways and have better adult relationships. Factors such as high quality family relationships, quality of communication and participation in family-oriented programs have been found to predict more positive adjustment of children upon the release of their father as well as better developmental outcomes and higher quality father-child relationships (Lösel et al., 2012). Importantly, in the current study the men felt there was a role for male Elders, both within and outside the prison, to share their experience as fathers and to assist young men to become better fathers and role models for their children. It was very important to the men that the program is run by men who understood their history, culture and challenges and be able to teach basic parenting skills as well as respecting spiritual and cultural traditions.

5.1.1 *Recommendation 1*

Provide Indigenous men the opportunity to develop their parenting skills through participation in a program in prison. The program should be developed in consultation with Indigenous fathers and be facilitated by respected Elders. The program should also provide the opportunity for Elders within the prison to share their experiences and guidance. The program should aim to develop basic parenting skills required for caring for children, effective parenting strategies, as well skills in playing with children, communicating with children and sharing emotions. The program should also be flexible to work with the specific needs of participants in relation to communicating with caregivers, improving relationship skills and being a contributing member of a family and community. These programs should be offered to men regardless of whether they will be living with their children upon release.

5.1.2 *Recommendation 2*

Develop post-release programs for men to assist their transition back into the family or community and to aid in the development of their parenting skills and transference of knowledge from prison programs to the community.

5.2 Quality and Quantity of Contact with Children

The third conclusion is that the quality of men's relationships with their children while imprisoned is related to the opportunities that they have for contact with their children. Less than a quarter of men ever received a visit from one of their children in the past year. In many cases these visits were one-off or sporadic. Two thirds of fathers in the current study

made phone calls to at least one of their children while approximately a quarter of men mentioned writing to their children. For some fathers the phone calls were regular but for other fathers their phone calls were more intermittent. Some men wanted to talk to their children but were unsure where their children were living. Other men relied on relatives to update them on their children's wellbeing, either through a visit or phone call with the relative or by a relative who was also in prison.

Almost two thirds of men indicated that they had problems maintaining a relationship with at least one of their children. Men reported losing a feeling of closeness to their children if they were not able to talk to them regularly or see them during visits. They also talked about the importance of being able to cuddle them and show them affection during a visit. Without the physical closeness men felt that they were not able to convey how much they loved and cared for their children. Some men were able to share their feelings and support their children through writing letters, but for other men their poor literacy was a barrier to this form of contact. It was evident that for men who did not receive visits and who did not have regular phone or letter contact with children, that their imprisonment created a greater distance between them and their children. Yet there was a subset of men who had little or no involvement with their children prior to imprisonment, therefore the quality of their relationship with their children remained unaltered as a consequence of imprisonment.

5.2.1 *Recommendation 3*

Improve the opportunities for men to have more frequent contact with their children, where it is desired and importantly, in the interests of the father and child. This could take place in the following ways: (a) subsidise STD calls for men whose children live in remote communities and have less opportunities to visit; (b) improve prison transport services so that families can have better access to prison visits; (c) provide better access to videoconferencing in prisons and in the community by exploring more cost effective ways to communicate, such as through Skype; (d) support men with poor literacy to maintain contact with children through means other than letter writing, such as by sharing artwork or recording stories for their children.

The fourth conclusion is that the major barriers to men maintaining a relationship with their children is the distance that families need to travel to visit, the expense of travel and accommodation to conduct a visit and the expense of STD phone calls. Unlike the results of the study of fathers in prison in South East Queensland, where the relationship between the father and the caregiver of the children was found to be a significant factor in fathers

maintaining contact with their children (Smallbone, 2012), in the current study the relationship with the caregiver did not appear to be a barrier to contact. Rather, contact was very much related to men's prior relationship with their children, whereby if they were close to their children prior to imprisonment they maintained contact with their children during imprisonment. It is unclear why the role of the caregiver was less pronounced in this study. It is possible that the imprisonment of the father in Indigenous communities did not carry the same level of shame and social stigma as it did for caregivers in South East Queensland, thereby having less of an impact on father's relationships with the caregivers. Or it may be that extended family members were facilitating contact and therefore there was less reliance of the relationship with the biological mother. These differences in the role of the caregiver should be examined in future research.

An important finding in this study was that the quality and quantity of contact was related to distance and financial disadvantage. Many families lived too far from the prison to make regular visits and men reported having to budget to be able to afford STD phone calls to their children. Only five men had a videoconference with their families, citing that the facilities were either not available in their communities or were too expensive for their families to afford. For men who did receive visits, they tended to be unhappy about the quality of those visits. They described the need to have better resources to facilitate their interaction with their children, to have longer visits (particularly when these visits are infrequent) and to have opportunities to share a meal together, to walk around in the open space with their families, and to have family photos taken. More than two thirds of men did not want their children to visit them in prison due to the anticipated emotional trauma of the visit for their children, both in terms of the separation at the end of the visit and the intimidating environment, and concerns about normalising the prison environment.

5.2.2 *Recommendation 4*

Improve the quality of visits between fathers and their families in the following ways: (a) Improve the conditions of the visits area by providing opportunities and resources for fathers to play with their children; (b) make visit areas more visually appealing and less intimidating for children; (c) where families are unable to make regular visits, explore ways to allow for extended visiting time for families; (d) create opportunities for fathers to share their culture and practice their parenting skills through family days where families can share a meal together, share stories and engage in activities together; and (e) create opportunities for families to have a photo taken together during visits.

5.2.3 *Recommendation 5*

Develop a service that supports Indigenous children of prisoners, particularly in relation to understanding and coping with emotions regarding separation. This service could provide support to children and caregivers prior to and after visits. Such a service could exist in the form of a community house adjacent to the prison where families can drop in (similar to a model used by Shine for Kids in NSW), as well as localised support in communities.

5.3 Caregivers and Communities

Drawing on the findings of our interviews with caregivers in a remote Indigenous community, the fifth conclusion is that caregiver's experiences of caring for a child with a father in prison tended to exist separately from the correctional system. Most women were unsure of the sentence length of the father, suggesting that their care of the children did not revolve around anticipated release dates. Four of the six women were caring for children with whom they had kinship ties and had facilitated contact between the child and their father where possible. However, half of the 16 children in this study had no contact with their father and only three children had visited their father. The majority of contact was through phone calls, although in most cases these did not occur regularly. The cost of phone calls and the difficulty in organising and affording a prison visit was cited as some reasons for such infrequent contact with the children's fathers. Most women viewed it as their role to look after the children when their father was imprisoned, but also indicated that it was a burden shared by relatives and the community more generally. Turanovic and colleagues (2012) found that the impact of an imprisoned father on caregivers was less if there was a family support system surrounding the caregiver. It was clear that the Indigenous culture of maintaining close kinship ties and communities participating in raising children remained a real strength in this particular community and was a source of support for the caregivers.

Because the children had little direct contact with the prison system, it is possible that specific correctional policies have little direct effect on these children. However, the high imprisonment levels of their adult men affect the community as a whole, as noted by Clear (2008), with the remaining community members carrying the responsibility of raising their children. Furthermore, there is the risk that with such high imprisonment rates of Indigenous men, a new generation of fatherless Indigenous children is being created. Rather than arguing that these imprisoned men have lost their opportunity to be good fathers, it may be more beneficial for at least some children, to find ways to support men to become better fathers and

have higher quality relationships with their children. In the absence of fathers, it may also be useful to find ways for respected men in communities to be role models and mentors for children whose fathers are in prison. Programs and services that support the caregiver and the community may also be beneficial, alongside but also separate to, specific measures to improve the quality and quantity of contact that children in remote communities are able to have with their fathers. As the sample of caregivers in this study was small and represented the experiences of one community, conclusions must be interpreted with caution. However, based on these interviews and the existing literature some tentative recommendations are made.

5.3.1 *Recommendation 6*

Examine ways to support the healthy development of children of prisoners in their communities. This includes: (a) supporting caregivers in their role through better access to services; (b) identifying ways for children to interact with and learn from male role models in their community; (c) culturally appropriate and indvidualised support services for children to assist them with their needs, regardless of whether they maintain contact with their imprisoned father. Such services and activities should be developed in consultation with the relevant community and ideally, provided by members of that community.

5.4 Limitations

This research provided an opportunity for Indigenous fathers in prison and caregivers of Indigenous children with imprisoned fathers to share their stories. Their self-reports provide a rich yet complex account of their experiences, but there are several limitations associated with reliance on these self-reports. Firstly, fathers did not always provide information on their relationship, or contact with, each of their children. Sometimes it was because they had no concerns about these children, but it is also possible that they had no contact with many of these children prior to, or during, imprisonment. As a result, interviews were coded at the father-level rather than at the child-level. We have attempted to be cautious in our conclusions given that we have missing data in relation to some children. Furthermore, the impact of imprisonment on children is according to father's reports, which is often based on little or no contact with the children themselves, therefore results should be interpreted with caution.

The study involving caregiver's accounts of caring for children of Indigenous prisoners should be regarded as a preliminary examination of the consequences of paternal

imprisonment for children living in a remote Queensland community. It was evident through the interviews with the caregivers and during time spent in the community, that the imprisonment of Indigenous fathers was felt throughout the community. It is unclear the extent to which support by extended family members and the community more generally exists in other remote and rural North Queensland communities or in other Indigenous communities around Australia. Further research is required to examine the extent that these women's experiences can be generalised across communities. However, in conducting research in Indigenous communities, adequate time must be allocated to the project to allow for building relationships in communities and gaining trust. This process is likely to require several visits to the community, over a period of time, and discussions with key stakeholder and respected Elders. Such research is required if appropriate support services are to be developed for caregivers and their children.

5.5 Conclusions

For many imprisoned men, their status as a father goes unrecognised within the confines of the prison fences. Already unsure of their roles as fathers, their life as a father and as a prisoner becomes separated. Some men are determined to have a positive influence in their children's lives and are taking opportunities to better themselves and build their parenting skills. But these opportunities are currently very limited with the correctional system. Other men are disconnected and happy to stay that way. However, some men struggle with the notion of fatherhood and are keen to be involved in their children's lives, but in the absence of learning what it means to be an active father, are unsure how to communicate effectively and connect with their children. While caution must be exercised so that children's best interests and wishes are acknowledged and protected, the reality is that if men choose to be involved in their children's lives, then in most instances they will have contact with their children. To the extent that such contact is positive and beneficial to their children may be dependent to some extent on the opportunities provided to Indigenous men to develop their skills as fathers. There is a clear opportunity to provide parenting programs in prisons and a strong desire by half of the men interviewed to participate in such programs. There is also a need to improve the quality and quantity of contact that Indigenous men have with their families. Prior research has demonstrated that if contact with children is not available during imprisonment, this can make adjustment upon release very difficult for fathers and their children, with ripple effects on communities.

There was some evidence that at least in one remote Indigenous community, extended family networks and the community as a whole bears the burden of high rates of male imprisonment through caring for the children left behind. While more research is needed to examine the generalisability of these findings and identify additional variations in the accounts of caregivers, it is also important to explore ways to support communities and caregivers in their care of children of imprisoned fathers. We already have generations of Indigenous people affected by forced removals and separation from parents. It is imperative that we take steps to negate the potential effect of paternal imprisonment on children and harness the obvious opportunities that exist to assist imprisoned fathers to further develop their parenting skills and maintain contact with their children.

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APPENDIX

Summary of study variables and designated coding

Variable	*N*	Description
Parenting variables		
Participant's father absent	38	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Raised with harsh or abusive parenting style	35	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Same parenting style as own caregiver	28	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Involved in disciplining children	37	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Played with children	35	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Involved in day to day care of children	31	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Cultural engagement	25	0 = No, 1 = Yes, 2 = No, but intends to after release
Role modeling	41	0 = No, 1 = Yes, 2 = No, but intends to after release
Current parental involvement	36	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Perceived negative impact of imprisonment on children	41	0 = No, 1 = Yes, 2 = Unsure
Imprisonment history variables (child level)		
Previous episode of paternal incarceration	119	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Number of previous episodes of paternal incarceration experienced by child	119	Continuous (number of episodes)
Cumulative total length of paternal imprisonment experienced by child	114	Continuous (months)
Contact variables		
Regular visits	41	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Phone contact	41	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Letter contact	33	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Videoconference contact	41	0 = Not stated, 1 = Yes
Relationship variables		
Father-child relationship problems	36	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Remained negative	41	0 = Not stated, 1 = Yes
Remained positive	41	0 = Not stated, 1 = Yes
Changed negative	41	0 = Not stated, 1 = Yes
Changed positive	41	0 = Not stated, 1 = Yes
Father-caregiver relationship problems	40	0 = No, 1 = Yes