

2011



Family Engagement in the Resettlement Process

What do prisoners' families from black, Asian and minority ethnic groups understand about resettlement?

This research seeks to understand resettlement provision for black, Asian and minority ethnic offenders from a family perspective. Imprisonment of a family member is a traumatic experience for the whole family but the process of successful resettlement is even more draining on family resources. This report is based on interviews with families who have highlighted the problems they face in supporting their family member.



changing lives
reducing crime

Neena Samota



CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	p.3
Summary	p.4
Introduction	p.5
Background	p.5
Aims of the research	p.7
Methods and limitations of the research	p.8
Family profile	p.10
Understanding resettlement – a family perspective	p.15
Experience of maintaining contact – barriers and concerns	p.20
Supporting the family member	p.23
Impact of imprisonment	p.27
Conclusion and recommendations	p.31



Acknowledgements

Coalition for Racial Justice (UK) and Nacro wish to thank all the families who participated in this research. We greatly appreciate their time and support and wish them well. We are grateful to Clinks for funding this research.

Many organisations and individuals helped to arrange interviews with prisoners' families. This study would not have been possible without their support. We wish to thank Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group (POPS) who facilitated a number of interviews with families they support. We are very grateful to Paula Richards from Offender Families Support Group Hampshire (OFSH) and Michael Ridge, Community Social Worker from the Haringey Travelling Peoples Team for their support. They helped us contact and facilitated interviews with families in a very short period of time. Annabel Davies from Nacro's Milestones Mentoring Project in London also helped to arrange interviews with families. We are grateful to Lucy Keenan (Action for Prisoners' Families) and Kimmett Edgar (Prison Reform Trust) for their support and for providing us with relevant contacts.

Summary

This report argues that while the UK government and the country's criminal justice apparatus wholly accept that family support for offenders reduces re-offending, neither have yet attempted to facilitate the active involvement of families in the resettlement process.

The research was commissioned by Clinks and funded through the Tackling Race Inequalities Fund by the UK Department for Communities and Local Government. It was motivated by the need to understand the impact of imprisonment on the families of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) offenders. Imprisonment is a family experience: whole families suffer its consequences in many ways that include distress and shame. But it is also widely recognised that families have a critical role in reducing re-offending and in resettlement.

For the past decade UK government policies have focused on implementing effective resettlement services. Meanwhile, a handful of voluntary-sector organisations have supported prisoners' families without the security of long-term funding for their projects. The scope of their work is now steadily expanding and extending into the community to help ex-offenders and their families. But little is known about the ability of these families to get involved and if they have the relevant information to support resettlement.

This report is based on interviews with 28 families, from different backgrounds, to examine their understandings of resettlement. It concludes that the involvement of families will materialise through better integrated support for families from prison and probation services. Changing broader societal attitudes, however, cannot be discounted in realising this goal.



1. Introduction

1.1 This research seeks to understand resettlement provision for BAME offenders from a family perspective. Imprisonment of a family member is a traumatic experience for the whole family but the process of successful resettlement is even more draining on family resources. The research focused on understanding and highlighting the problems specifically faced by prisoners' families from BAME groups.

Background

1.2 Research undertaken in 1994 by the Bristol Centre for Criminal Justice, with POPS, was one of the first studies in the UK to focus on the needs of prisoners' families from black and Asian communities. The research aimed to examine whether the problems faced by families of black and Asian prisoners were any different compared to their white counterparts. The experience of families in the report illustrated several problems; in treatment at arrest, trial and sentence; lack of information for visiting; racial discrimination; and financial hardship. The report recommended further research involving prisoners' families to acquire better understanding of needs and for policy-makers and practitioners to formulate effective responses.¹

1.3 In 2002, the Social Exclusion Unit's (SEU) report, *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners* made a significant contribution to our understanding about what works in reducing re-offending. Built on criminological and social research, the report identified nine key factors that influenced re-offending which included family networks. The report asserted,

Maintaining family relationships can help to prevent prisoners re-offending and can assist them to successfully settle into the community. However, support and advice for families is limited, visiting facilities are often inadequate, and families are rarely involved in the process of tackling offending behaviour. Also, there is scarcely any post-release support, which is the time when relationships are at most risk of breaking down.

¹ Light, R., (1994) *Black and Asian Prisoners' Families*, Bristol: Centre for Criminal Justice, University of the West of England.

1.4 The SEU report identified some key problems from a family perspective. These included the lack of family involvement in the decision-making process, minimal opportunities to support prisoners effectively and families feeling further victimised by being assumed 'guilty by association'. Numerous other studies that followed this seminal report emphasised the critical role of families in helping offenders in their resettlement and eventual re-integration into society. Overall, the limitations and lack of support, described above, have to some extent been tackled by the voluntary sector but much more remains to be fulfilled, including a more integrated involvement of families in the criminal justice process.

1.5 Issues related to family involvement, well-being and parenting are central to working with families of prisoners and ex-offenders. Prisoners' families and their children face significant challenges trying to cope with their circumstances. The case for investing in families of prisoners is well made by voluntary sector organisations working in the criminal justice system. Prisoners' families and their children make a positive contribution to resettlement and re-integration which eventually reduces crime. Their contributions, however, need to be supported by different government departments that link criminal justice with social care.

1.6 Recent research studies make a link between prisoners receiving family visits with better employment and accommodation outcomes after release. The *Resettlement Surveys Reoffending Analysis* demonstrates that having no visits in prison from family members increased the risk of re-offending 1.39 times.² The imprisonment of a parent, particularly

² May, C., Sharma, N. and Stewart, D. (2008) *Factors linked to reoffending: a one-year follow-up of prisoners who took part in the Resettlement Surveys 2001, 2003 and 2004*. Research Summary 5. London: Ministry of Justice available at <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/docs/research-factors-reoffending.pdf> . See also Browne, C Deborah, (2005) *Research on Prisoners' Families – Building An Evidence Base For Best Policy and Practice*. Action for Prisoners' Families. Available at http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk/uploadedFiles/Information_and_research/Literature%20Review%202005.PDF



women, affects the futures of their children; 63% of boys with a convicted parent go on to offend in later life and children in care are twice as likely to be convicted of a crime.³

1.7 Resettlement is a difficult and complicated process for prisoners. In addition to the stigma of a prison sentence – which often lasts much longer than the term served, and frequently jeopardises the chance of securing a job or a home – the chances of making a fresh start can be hampered by the lack of appropriate resettlement services.⁴ For BAME prisoners the experience of accessing resettlement services is further complicated by their negative experiences and perceptions of race and discrimination in the criminal justice system.⁵

1.8 The literature more specifically examining the needs of families of BAME offenders and their children is sparse.⁶ In the voluntary sector, Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Groups (POPS) run a project to support families from BAME groups. There is some evidence to show that black children with parents in prison are particularly vulnerable to racism from peers.⁷ For families of BAME offenders, imprisonment adds to their economic vulnerability and contributes to their social exclusion.⁸ Given the potential value of involving family in the resettlement process it would be important to learn more about the families themselves.

Aims of the research

1.9 The research aimed to address two main questions:

³ See *Reducing re-offending: supporting families, creating better futures*, Ministry of Justice and DCSF review, 2007 available at <http://www.justice.gov.uk/reducing-reoffending-supporting-families.pdf> . For more information on families and children see also Family and Parenting Institute's *The UK Family Friendly Report Card 2010* available at <http://www.familyandparenting.org/reportCard2010#10>

⁴ Samota, N., (2002) *Resettling prisoners from black and minority ethnic groups*. London: Nacro.

⁵ For further information see Jacobson et al (2010), '*Double Trouble*'? *Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Offenders' Experiences of Resettlement* , available at <http://www.clinks.org/assets/files/PDFs/'Double%20Trouble'.pdf>

⁶ Wright, S. and Khan, S. (2010) *The Support Needs of Offenders and their Families*. Thames Valley Partnership.

⁷ See *Children of prisoners – maintaining family ties*, Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2008 available at <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/guides/guide22/files/guide22.pdf>

⁸ Smith, R., Grimshaw, R., Romeo, R. And Knapp, M. (2007) *Poverty and disadvantage among prisoners' families*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

- a) What do the families of BAME offenders understand about the resettlement process?
- b) What is currently available to them by way of support and whether this is relevant to their needs?

The key issues in relation to resettlement that were examined with the families included:

- **Access** – what sort of resettlement and rehabilitative services do families of BAME offenders access? What is their level of knowledge and awareness about what constitutes the resettlement process.
- **Equity** – to examine and better understand issues about equality of access to services from the perspective of families.
- **Barriers** – to explore barriers to resettlement for BAME offenders as understood and experienced by their families.
- **Improving outcomes** – to identify solutions to remove existing barriers and improve positive outcomes for BAME offenders and their families.

Methods and limitations of the research

1.10 The research is based on a qualitative study about the experiences of families. Data was collected using in-depth, one-to-one interviews with families. The key issues of **access, equity, barriers and improving outcomes** were integrated into the planning and delivery of the interviews. This helped to examine cross-cutting issues as experienced by the families. Access to families was made through voluntary-sector organisations who help support prisoners' families such as POPS, Action for Prisoners' Families, Offender Families Support Group Hampshire and the Irish Chaplaincy for Britain.

1.11 The research originally aimed to generate 15-20 interviews with offenders' families and to follow-up with a workshop to develop recommendations. However, in the three month period available to do the research it was not possible to do the workshop but more interviews were completed with families instead. Although research based on interviews is limited to perspectives of the interviewees much of the evidence elicited in this research relates closely to findings from similar research studies.

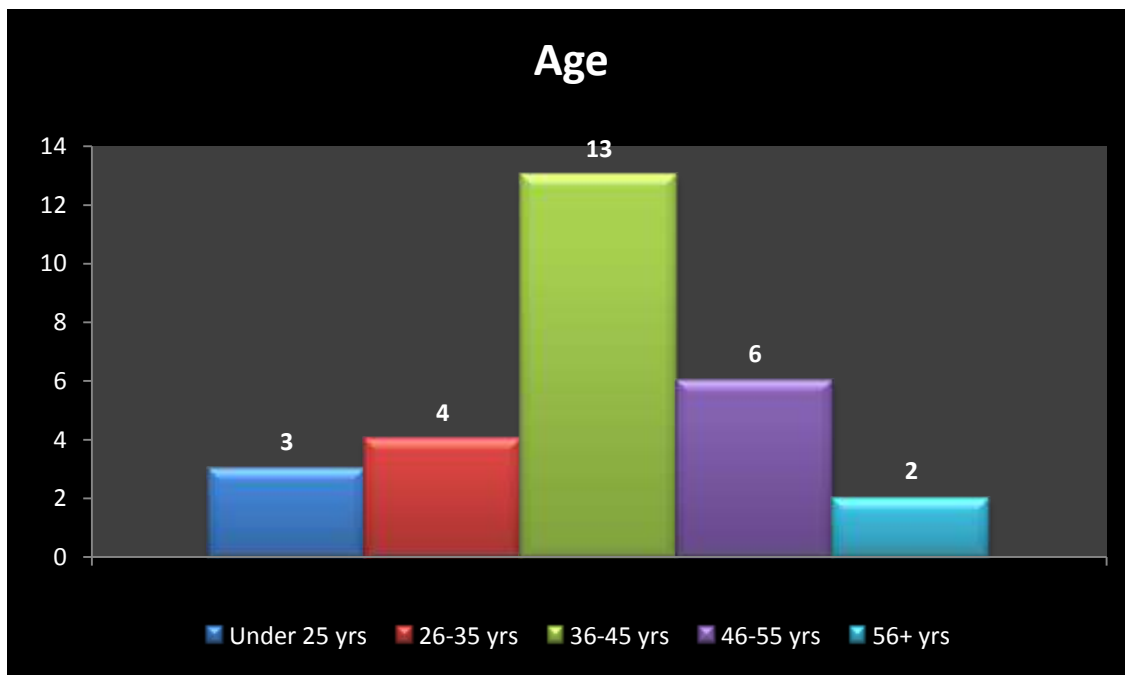
1.12 The purpose of this research was also to give voice to the experiences of families from other minority groups such as gypsies and travellers. Not much is known about the specific problems these families are exposed to and how they deal with imprisonment and resettlement. Foster- carers/parents are another hidden minority and not much is known about their experiences and ability to cope and support. Despite some successes achieved by government initiatives such as *Quality Protects* and *Choice Protects* the outcomes for children in care remain poor. Looked-after children aged 10 or over are more than twice as likely as other children to be cautioned or convicted of an offence and are over-represented among teenage parents, drug users and prisoners.⁹ Despite concerted attempts to contact organisations supporting foster-carers it was not possible to interview any families. This limitation highlights some of the practical difficulties in contacting families who have responsibility of care for individuals from BAME groups.

⁹ *Looked-after Children*, Third Report of Session 2008–09, HC 111-I, London: The Stationery Office Limited. See also Owen, C. And Statham, J. (2009) *Disproportionality in child welfare: the prevalence of black and minority ethnic children within the 'looked after' and 'children in need' populations and on child protection registers in England*. London: Department for Education.

2. Family profile

2.1 Overall, 28 families were interviewed for this research in Southampton, London and Manchester. Families interviewed in Manchester were contacted through POPS. The graphs below present a profile of the families and presents results in numbers rather than percentages.

Figure 1

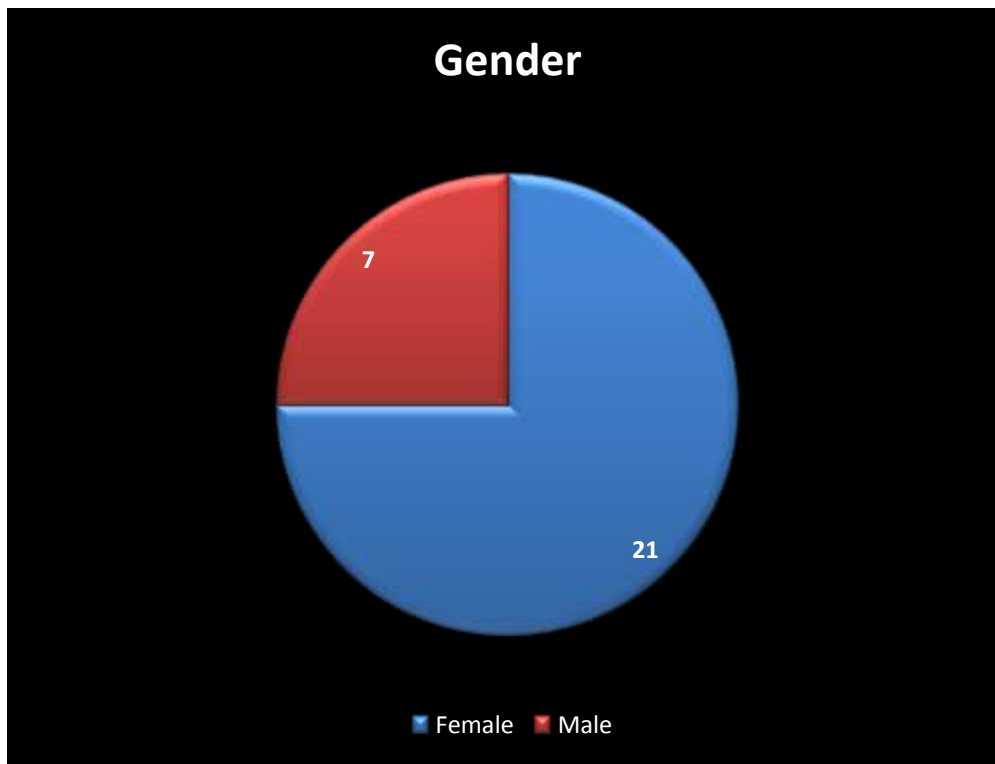


A majority of the families were aged 36-45 years and overall most family members were above 35 years of age.

2.2 Figure 2 below illustrates gender. More women than men represented the family experience. In the sample, 5 participants said they were single and 1 was divorced; these were all women. Research shows that single mothers can experience additional disadvantages in parenting as well as employment. Due to child care responsibilities their employment options are generally limited to part-time work and this leads to other problems such as low income, isolation and depression.¹⁰ It is also well known that a higher percentage of black families are headed by a lone parent (usually black Caribbean women)

¹⁰ For more information see *Single parents, Equal families* factsheet at www.gingerbread.org.uk

compared to families from other ethnic groups.¹¹ The additional stress of having a husband/partner or a child in prison brings more disadvantages to women.



2.3 The distribution by ethnicity in the sample shows a higher proportion of black and Asian families. Families who identified themselves as 'white' were married to a person of either black or Asian ethnic origin. Criminal justice statistics show an over-representation of prisoners and offenders from BAME groups as well as those from a 'mixed' ethnic background. A statistically significant proportion of young adults from a 'mixed' background are victims of crime compared to other groups.¹² The correlation between being a victim of crime and offending is well established. For some families we interviewed this was a significant concern in relation to other young adults in the household. Unlike other BAME groups, the gypsy and traveller groups remain unknown in the criminal justice statistics and therefore their experiences of resettlement remain to be identified.¹³ The three families

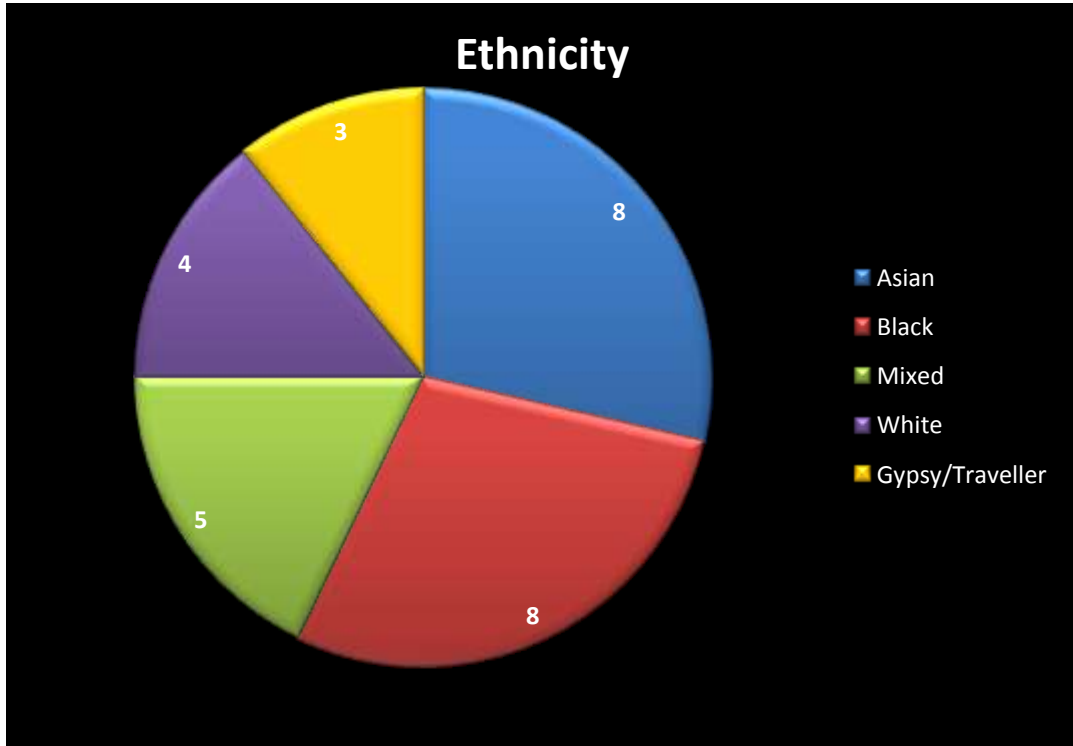
¹¹ Bowling, B. and Phillips, C. (2002) *Racism, Crime and Justice*, Harlow: Longman Criminology series.

¹² See *Statistics on Race and the Criminal Justice System 2008/09*, (2010) London: Ministry of Justice.

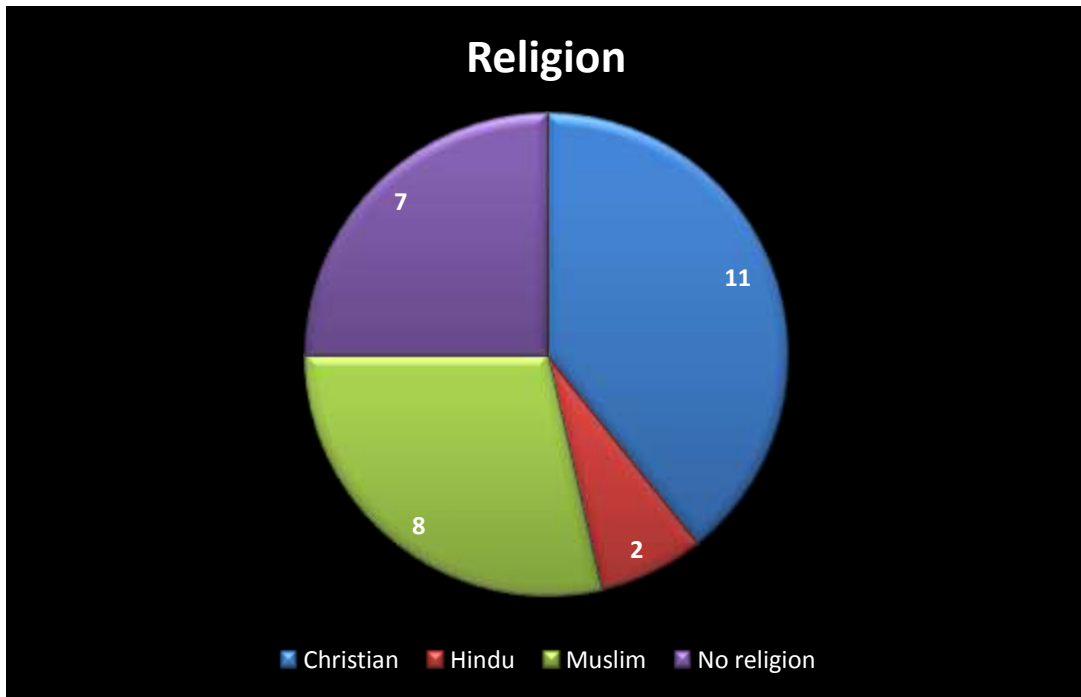
¹³ Forthcoming, *Travellers in Prison Project* report, London: The Irish Chaplaincy in Britain (ICB)

www.irishchaplancy.org.uk

contacted for this research provided some useful insights to their unique problems and experience of the criminal justice system.

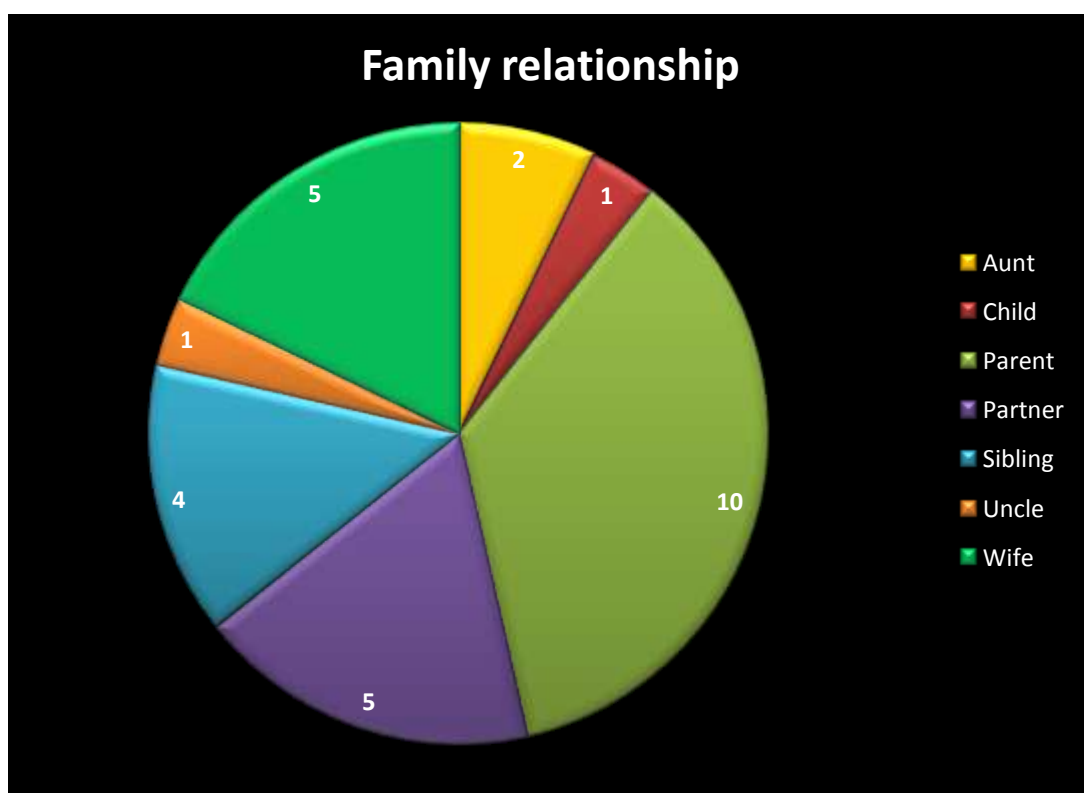


2.4 The chart below shows the religious affiliation of families in the sample.



A majority of families were Christian and a high proportion of the families in the sample were Muslims. The majority of families agreed that faith was important to them and to a large extent helped them cope in their difficult situations.

2.5 Families interviewed for this research came from diverse backgrounds and related to the prisoner or offender in different ways. The vast majority were a parent and an equal proportion comprised wives and partners. We spoke to families who, either still had a family member in prison and those who were expecting imminent release. In all 28 cases the person in prison was a male member of the family.



2.6 In addition to the above profile, families provided us with other useful information about their personal situation.

- A vast majority of respondents were married women with care responsibilities for a number of other children. At a minimum they were responsible for 2 children and maximum 7 other children. This suggests that family resources related to housing, financial and emotional support in many cases were already strained.

- Most families were living in privately rented accommodation or in council housing. There is research evidence to establish the link between council housing, unemployment and disadvantage. There is a higher proportion of disadvantaged lone-parents residing in council housing. Research also shows that BAME groups, across all indices of deprivation, are less likely to be living in council housing compared to their white counterparts.¹⁴ In the past, council housing strategies have been more effective in targeting deprivation in white groups than in BAME groups. Where families live has some influence on their encounters and experiences of crime.
- In 9 instances the family member interviewed was unemployed and 5 were employed part-time. Only 2 participants were in full-time employment and they were male. Those in part-time jobs were all women. Three of the 7 men interviewed were unemployed.
- In 16 of the 28 interviews, families claimed that this was the first experience of prison for their family member. For the others, the family member had been in prison either once, three times, five times and in 3 cases more than five times. In 26 instances the person was sentenced. Sentence lengths ranged from 9 weeks to life. Most individuals were serving sentences for 3, 4 and 5 years. In 8 instances the family member admitted that they had another member of the family in prison.

¹⁴ Lee, P. and Murie, A. (1997) *Poverty, housing tenure and social exclusion*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation
CRJ (UK) | Nacro



3. Understanding resettlement – A family perspective

3.1 The Prison Service Order 2300 sets out the mandatory requirements for the management and delivery of resettlement for prisoners.¹⁵ Issued in 2001, this PSO describes resettlement as a core function of the prison service which aims to reduce reoffending and protect the public. The PSO requires prisons to consult with statutory, private and voluntary sector agencies in preparing prisoners for resettlement. The security category of a prisoner determines how sentenced prisoners are allocated to different prison types. Operational considerations sometimes take precedence over family ties and resettlement needs in relation to allocation. Although the PSO clearly states that this decision must be balanced to reinforce the resettlement process. The importance of family ties is well established in the PSO as are the measures to improve family ties such as better facilities for visits through more visitors' centres, payphones for prisoners' use and consulting and working with prisoners' family support groups.

3.2 Few prisoners are aware about resettlement advice let alone the PSO and the resettlement process it sets out. For Muslim prisoners and gypsies and travellers, understanding and awareness of resettlement advice is relatively low or non-existent.¹⁶ Information and understanding of a process are pre-requisites to involvement and participation of individuals and groups. The Prison Service frequently consults voluntary-sector organisations working with offenders' families and other family support groups to understand the resettlement needs of different prisoner groups. Since the PSO on resettlement was issued in 2001, families too have been consulted but rarely involved. Involvement and consultation are different in that the former is an ongoing process but the latter is time-limited and can be passive. This distinction is important as it explains the lack of involvement of families in the resettlement process.

¹⁵ Prison Service Order 2300: Resettlement, HM Prison Service, 2001.

¹⁶ Nacro and EMTEP (2009) Muslim Prisoner Scoping Study, Race & Equalities Action Group, NOMS, London: Nacro. See also Nacro (2009) Gypsy, Traveller and Romany Prisoners Good Practice Guide, Race & Equalities Action Group, NOMS, London: Nacro.

Curry, D. (2009) *A Survey of Muslim Prisoners' Families*. Manchester POPS

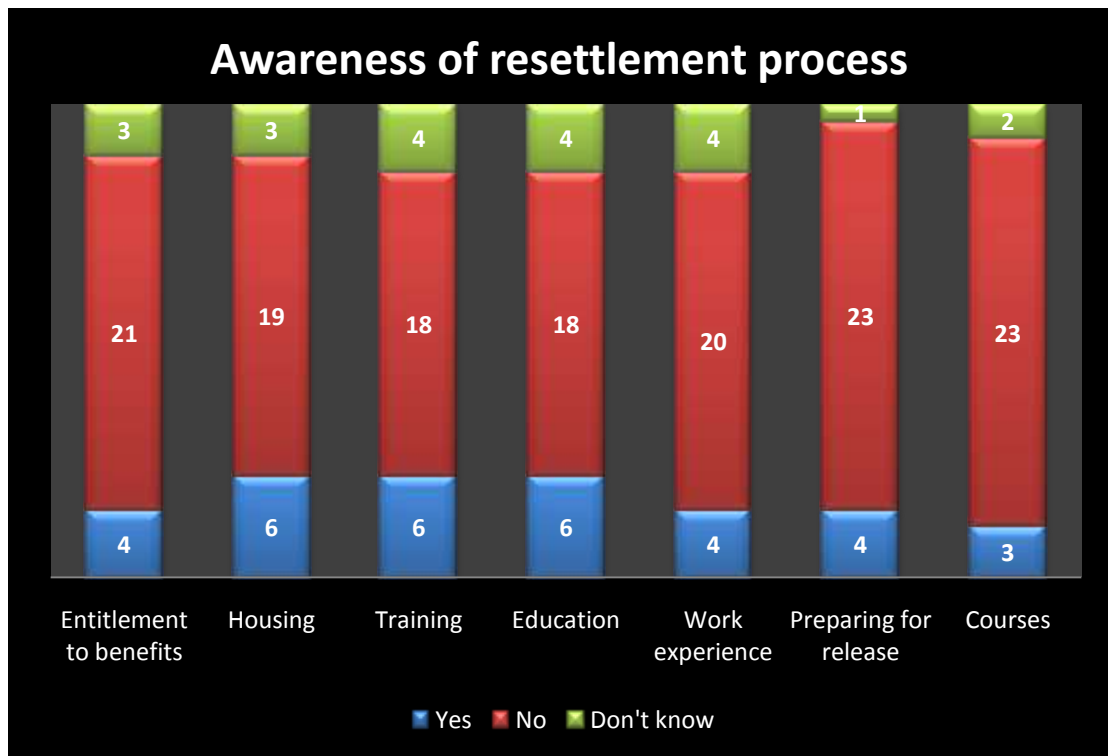
Said, I. (2011) *Young british muslim ex-offenders and resettlement needs*, London: Muslim Youth Helpline.

3.3 Resettlement is not an easy concept to understand because it is used in many different ways and means a variety of things to different people. Giving information and advice on resettlement, the Prison Service website states,

Resettlement is where prisoners and their families receive assistance and support from the Prison and Probation Services, and voluntary agencies to help them prepare for life after prison. This includes advice about their entitlement to state benefits, training, education, work experience and preparation for release. The objective is to help prisoners return to normal life, get a job and home, and cope with life without re-offending. There are a number of initiatives that help us achieve this objective.
<http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/adviceandsupport/beforeafterrelease/resettlement/>

For prisons, resettlement is a process which involves the delivery of support and interventions before and after release. We asked families about their awareness of the resettlement process and what it involved and asked them about their understanding of resettlement. For the families we spoke to, and indeed for prisoners themselves, it was more than a process which also involved the ability to give emotional support. From a family perspective, re-integration with family members, rebuilding relationships and recovery from drug and/or alcohol abuse were all linked to the realities of resettlement. According to families, resettlement was more about provision of emotional support, daily encouragement, giving hope and being patient.

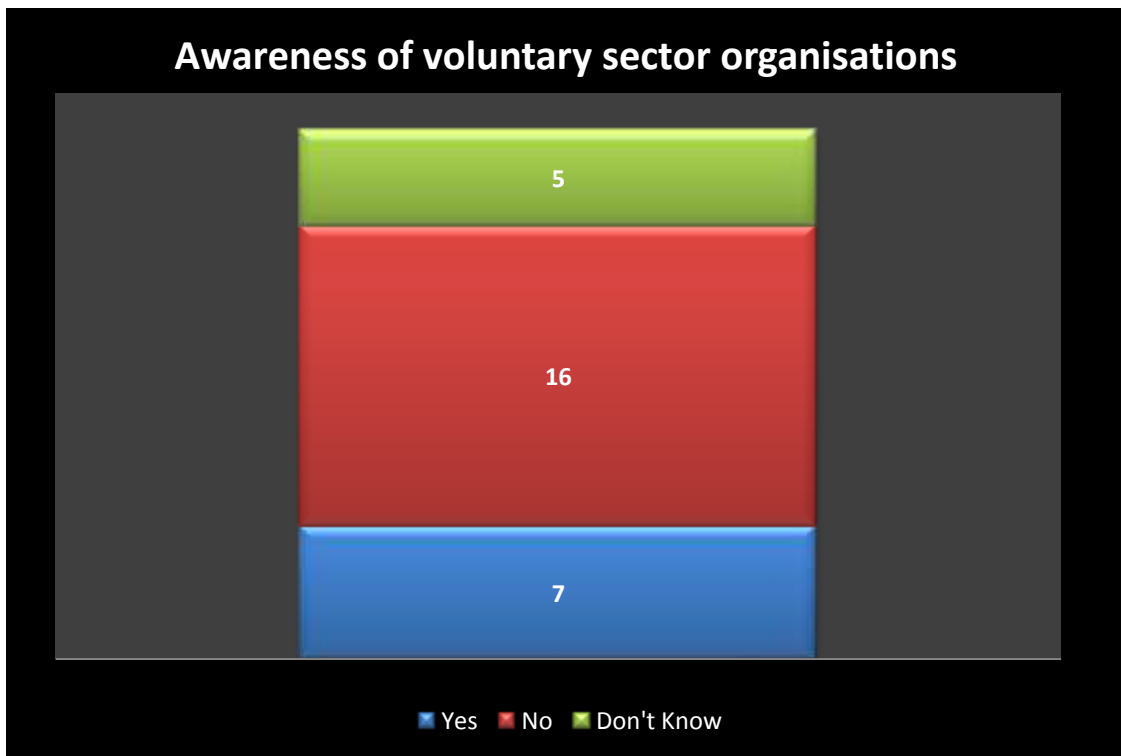
The chart below illustrates how little families knew about the resettlement process and about receiving assistance from prison, probation and voluntary agencies to support their family member.



3.4 These areas were explored with families in the interviews and it was clear that a vast majority of respondents were not satisfied with the level of information and advice about resettlement. Four families were satisfied and 5 said they did not know. Almost all families agreed that they would benefit from further information and advice. The following key areas emerged constantly for further advice and involvement:

- access to personal officers (during visits or via phone or e-mail)
- parental involvement in sentence planning
- advice and support to mentoring and employment networks
- family support and advice through all stages of the criminal justice process

3.5 The graph below demonstrates the extent to which families were aware of voluntary sector organisations providing support to offenders' families.



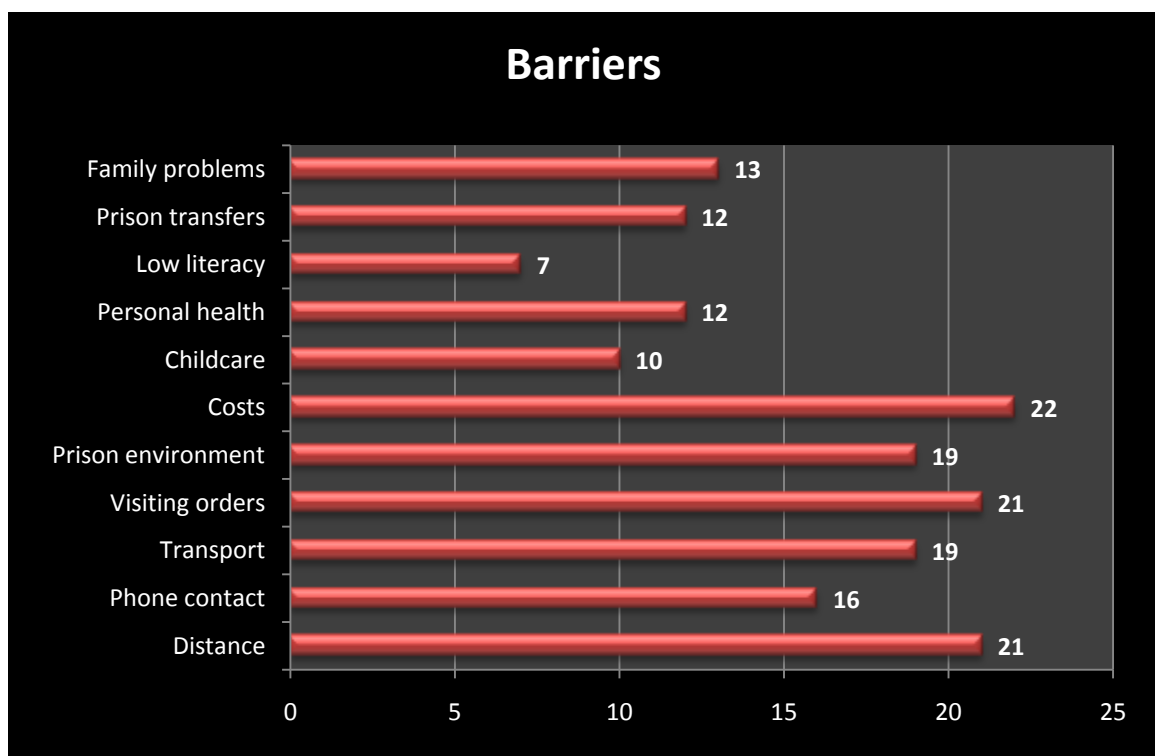
It is clear that most families were not aware of voluntary sector organisations that assist prisoners and their families in a number of ways. The OFSH for instance started a self-help group to mitigate these gaps in knowledge. Based in Southampton, which does not have a very high BAME population, smaller support groups can often feel excluded and isolated from policy-makers and bigger voluntary sector organisations. Similarly, gypsies and travelling peoples teams supported through local councils are rare. The few that exist, like the Haringey Travelling Peoples Team, in North London, are not adequately resourced and often dependent on individual commitment and initiative to provide advice and information. In some cases families learnt about voluntary sector organisations through prisoners. Very few accessed information from the visitor centres at prisons. In the interviews we learnt that families had no idea that this information could be sourced through the visitor centres which are often run by voluntary sector organisations such as POPS, Ormiston Children and Families Trust, pact etc. Some other families told us that despite information leaflets readily available at the visitor centres there was no motivation at the time to get it because they were too distracted and anxious and just wanted to 'get on with the visit'.

3.6 Findings from the interviews confirm evidence from other research regarding factors that determine use and access to services by BAME groups. Most families did not access support and advice due to their general perception of the inability of criminal justice agencies to meet diverse needs, language requirements and having a representative workforce. The importance of family involvement and support as a preventive measure of help was also well articulated.

4. Experience of maintaining contact – barriers and concerns

4.1 Families experience considerable strain just keeping in touch with their family member in prison. There are a number of difficulties that need to be negotiated during each visit; taking leave from an employer for the visit, distance from home, child-care costs, transport, language barriers for those who are not fluent in English those who cannot read or write and problems with disability. These are mostly physical and financial barriers. There are families who do not wish to visit because of the nature of crime committed by their family member. In some cases women with experiences of domestic abuse who visit their spouse or partner may do so under emotional duress. The emotional and psychological problems faced by some family members remain unknown.

4.2 In our interviews with families the most commonly cited problems included costs, visiting orders and distance from prison. The chart below illustrates these barriers.



Many others found the prison environment particularly hard. Families accompanied with children were searched, duration of the visits was sometimes shortened and waiting in the visits area was uncomfortable for some women. We were also told by a number of families that they felt awkward when going to visit the first time and that the gaze of staff in the

visits area made them feel as though they were somehow guilty. This was a distraction and left them feeling guilty about not spending quality time with their family member.

4.3 Some families carried negative experiences of discrimination and harassment of other criminal justice agencies. This inevitably affected their perceptions and attitude towards prison staff. The experience of a family in this regard is articulated below by a mother.

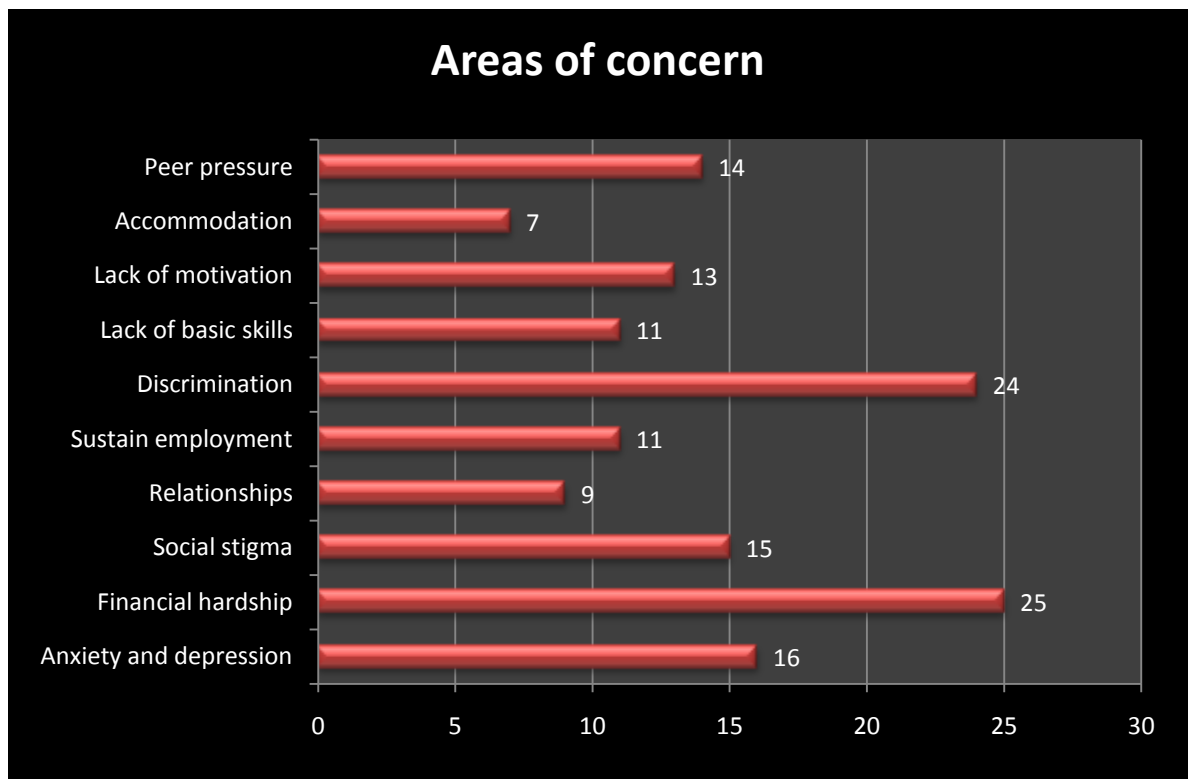
I have no confidence that the system will do anything right. We had a bad experience right from the word go when my son got into trouble with the police. Police were not very helpful and we felt harassed by them at every stage. The court experience was terrible with an all-white jury, of course! When he was sent to prison the visit system was not very nice where remand family members went to go in to the visits room first. Families of sentenced prisoners went later. This obviously affected the duration of the visit and was not fair on us. Probation experience was equally negative and they were no help to my son at all. They refused to extend his tag when he got a chance to go to London to make a presentation of his work. I know he is talented and do live in hope that he will end up in the right place. My husband and I try our best to help him every way we can.

4.4 In some cases, other ‘family problems’ were a barrier to maintaining contact through visits. Typically these problems included inability to travel due to ill-health, stigma involved in asking friends to help with child-care, in some cases deliberately wanting to keep other siblings away from the prison environment and dealing with relationship problems with spouse/partner. A mother told us during the interview that she deliberately avoided going so far away to meet her son in prison to avoid further tension with her husband. She said,

I know it is difficult for us both as it is the first time this has happened to us. We are a hard-working and law-abiding family. But it hurts more when he gets angry at our situation and blames me for our son being in prison. He says, I should have paid more attention and that it has all been my fault. This is unfair because I have 5 other children to look after and I cannot be everywhere. It is so frustrating sometimes and I have nobody to talk to, about how I feel.

4.5 Families were asked to list the kind of problems they expected their family member to face upon release and their ability to provide support. A vast majority of individuals were able to offer support in some way. However in some cases, families wanted timely advice and information at earlier stages in the criminal justice process to plan appropriately for

their family member. The chart below illustrates some common areas of concern that families expected their family member to face upon release.



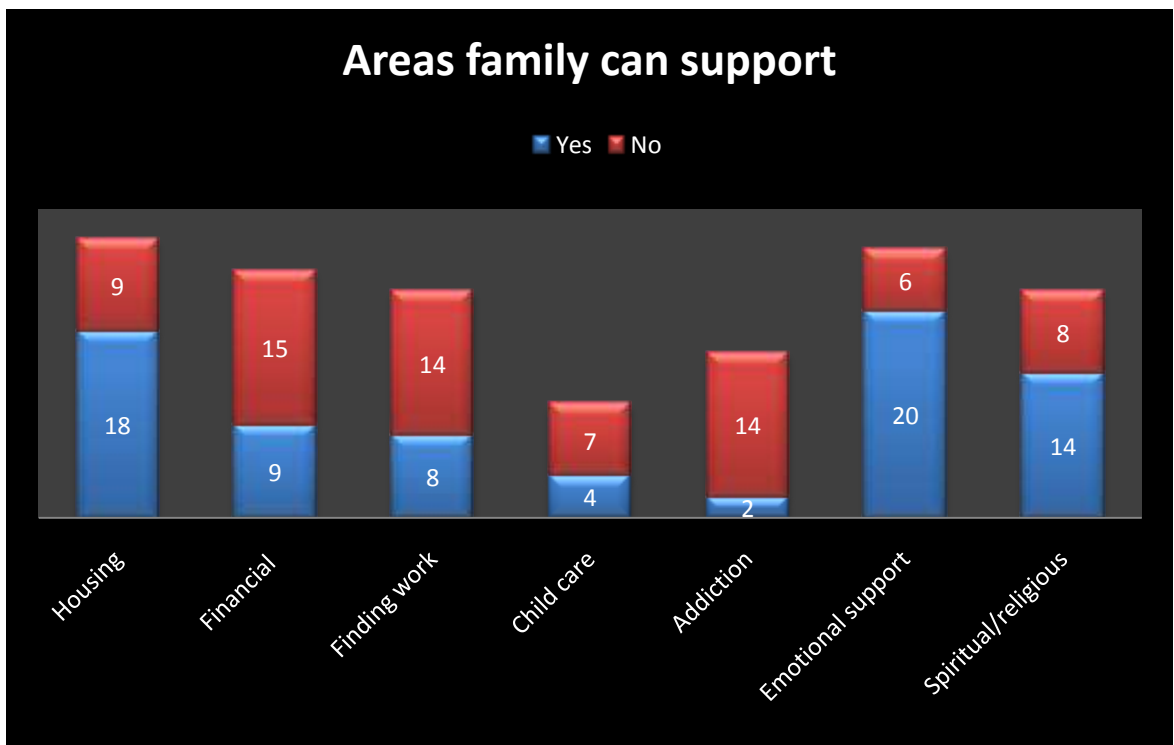
4.6 Mostly families were concerned about discrimination, based on racial identity and criminal record. Financial hardship was another key problem the family member experienced on release. Some parents were worried about exposure to the same peer pressure that led to the first offending instance. It was extremely hard, explained a mother, for a young person of 'mixed race' to remain nondescript in an area that is predominantly white. For most Asian and black Muslim women, social stigma and mental health (anxiety and depression) problems were the main concerns. This was because the family member (usually the father or male sibling) would refuse to access help for their mental health problem and withdraw from their immediate social environment. Differences of opinion among family members on such matters would lead to further strained relations in the family.

5. Supporting the family member

5.1 Families are usually best placed to judge how family resources need to be allocated and shared within the family. This generally includes physical (house, car, income etc) and emotional resources. Imprisonment causes an additional drain by substantially depleting these resources. The family members who are left behind are often on their own to re-arrange their lives and family resources. Some, more than others, need additional support before they can begin to consider how they can support the resettlement process of their family member. Some families need the time and space to recover as well. This is significant for those whose family member is recovering from drug abuse. As one mother pointed out in exasperation,

I am fed-up now. I need a break. I have seen him go in and out of prison twice and he is still on drugs. Keeps telling me he won't but ends up with the same friends outside. This time he was diagnosed with a personality disorder. They say he needs to be on medication... he is suffering from mental health problems now. I don't want him staying in my house anymore. He will drive me mad and he upsets his little brother.

5.2 The graph below shows areas that families can provide support in.

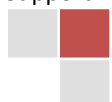


Families in this research sample could offer support in relation to housing, emotional support and spiritual/religious support. Family resources in other important areas linked to success in resettlement were often poor. These included support with finances on release, help with addiction and mental health problems and finding and sustaining employment. Research evidence would confirm a strong correlation between imprisonment, poverty and disadvantage. For some families, we interviewed, state benefits like income support and housing benefit were their only source of income.

5.3 More specifically for BAME groups, experiences of discrimination and disadvantage affect their ability to support their family member. Families told us that they were not equipped to support addiction and mental health problems. Some felt they were unable to support because these conditions required specialist treatment but some others said they would feel ashamed and stigmatised to seek help openly. Inequalities in health-related outcomes are not a new concern for BAME communities. Health inequalities are linked to and often shape social inequalities.¹⁷ Poor mental health is linked to family breakdown, substance abuse and crime. The over-representation of BAME groups in mental health and criminal justice statistics is well documented. Addressing social inequalities means addressing the conditions that cause poor mental health conditions in the first place. However, in the case of BAME communities the impact of culture, race, ethnicity and religion on mental illness need to be addressed.

5.4 Most families said they could not help their family member in finding employment. This was because most of the respondents were women who were either unemployed, looking for a job or employed part-time. Research evidence suggests that employment has a greater impact on desistance in individuals aged over 26. However, to achieve this, social ties and networks represent the most effective means of securing employment. A study into the resettlement outcomes of prisoners released found that of those who had entered the labour market, 51% found employment, training, or education through social networks and

¹⁷ Samota, N. (2010) *Evaluation of the Hammersmith and Fulham CDW Service*. London: Hestia Housing & Support



85% of opportunities for fresh employment and training were secured through social ties.¹⁸ As suggested earlier, imprisonment depletes family resources and this is felt more acutely in households where a male member of the family is in prison. Single-mothers and women more generally do not have access to meaningful social networks that can help find employment opportunities for male members returning from prison. This could be because the employment profile of women interfaces with different job industries compared to men or because they have care responsibilities and are often at home.

5.5 The benefit of family support is experienced directly by the family member and more indirectly by the criminal justice agencies. Families have a substantive role in supporting prisoner needs, in some cases bringing information about voluntary sector agencies and social networks and in highlighting problem areas and suggesting alternatives when speaking on behalf of their children to prison and probation officers. In many cases young people in prison need to be guided and supported in the decisions they make or programmes they agree to attend. Most of the families in this research wanted direct contact with personal officers so they could help make the right decisions in the best interests of their children. Families also play an instrumental role in effecting behavioural change before problems become entrenched. In some cases, children of prisoners help bring a sense of responsibility and promote family belonging their parents would not have experienced themselves. The normative role of a family brings structure and a sense of normality to a prisoner's life. Family members, who are well educated and responsible, help their family members interpret information, build capacity and a sense of confidence to negotiate with the outside world upon release.

5.6 In this research four family members who were interviewed were siblings. Although sibling relationships are very important in people's lives the policy implications for siblings remain ambiguous. For instance, resettlement policy encouraging family support would

¹⁸ Niven, S., and Stewart, D. (2005) *Resettlement outcomes on release from prison in 2003*, Findings 248. London: Home Office

appear to refer mostly to the parent, the spouse/partner and children of prisoners. The role of a sibling is rarely inferred as a source of support. It is important to account for these relationships because siblings often support and protect each other in later life. For example, in the absence of the male parent in Asian families, older siblings (mostly male) often assume parental responsibility and make decisions on key family matters such as marriage, ancestral property and assets. A family member interviewed for this research demonstrated her experience of being put in a supportive role.

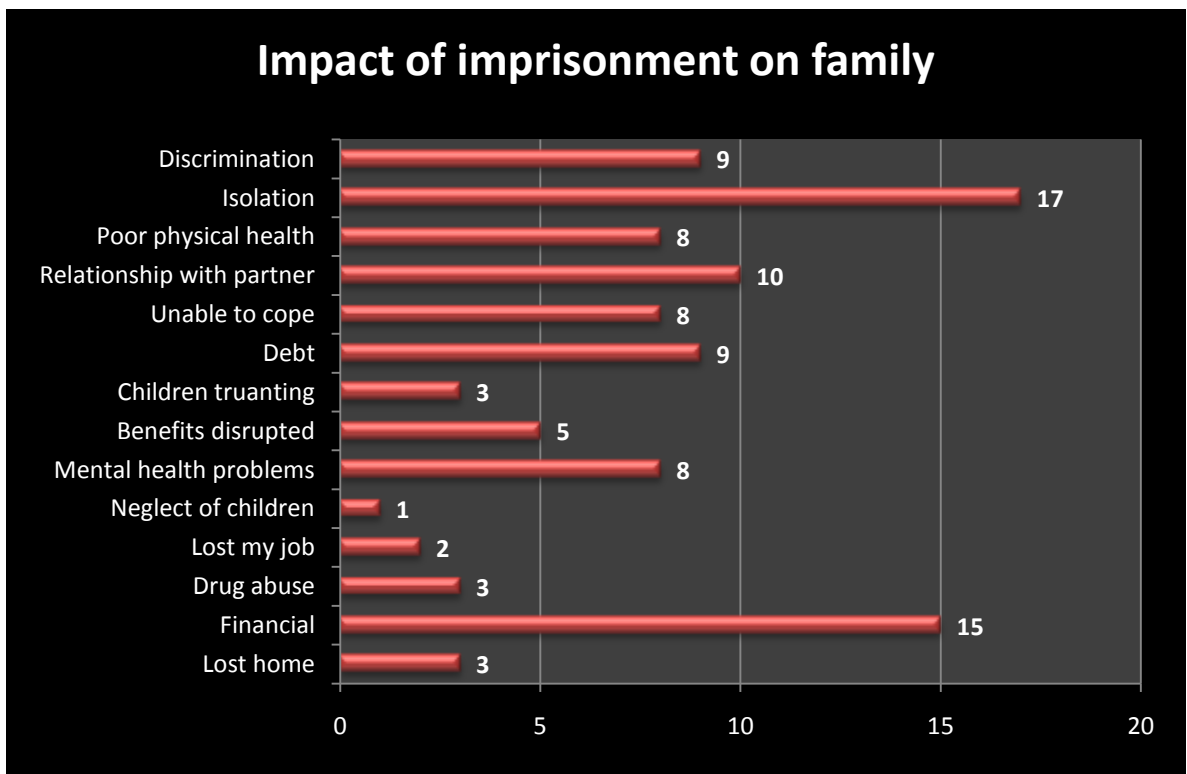
We did not know what to do next. My brothers were in custody and the solicitor was of no help at all. My mother was distraught and kept asking me to do an appeal as she thought the sentence was unfair. She cannot speak English and it was very hard to explain the system to her. It took a while before we could see a solicitor and we were seen as just silly members making fuss. No one was available to help. I had just passed my driving test and my brothers were sent to two different prisons. I had never been on the motorway but I had to do it for the sake of my Mum and brothers...I was studying at the time and had three young children. It was very upsetting for me having to drag my children around everywhere. But in the absence of my brothers I had to assume responsibility and look after my Mum.



6. Impact of imprisonment

6.1 The Family and Parenting Institute recognise that family well-being depends on a number of factors. It is linked to the physical, social, political and cultural environments and communities in which families live. Family well-being can also be defined in relation to meeting needs within the family by exchanging resources such as love, goods, money and information. Family well-being is also about the quality of relationships within the family which include communication between members, conflict resolution, support and care for each other. All these factors determine family well-being. Crises such as bereavement, unemployment, mental health problems and imprisonment put serious stresses on family well-being. Having a parent in prison can impair the life-chances of children and this can lead to other problems such as low aspirations and poverty in later life.

6.2 The graph below shows the impact of imprisonment on the family.



For the majority of family members in the sample the biggest impact of imprisonment was isolation. This is significant given that 21 out of the 28 families we spoke to were represented by women. It is also well established that women from BAME groups experience isolation due to imprisonment of a family member. Shame and fear of stigma in

BAME communities prevents women with complex social problems from seeking help. This has implications for reaching support services for women from these groups. A woman whose husband had been to prison several times explained,

He beats me up when he is drunk so I am glad he is in prison. I can focus on my other children. I don't trust anybody so would not tell as there is great shame in being divorced in our community. They talk... it is women who suffer in the end, all the time. I wish I was a better role model for my daughter.

6.3 Loss of income and depletion of financial resources was another significant impact on the family. This had further implications for the ability to maintain contact with their family member. It was not simply the cost of travel but also the added problem of paying child-care costs in some cases. Some women who had to take additional roles of responsibility in the family had to defer their education. This in itself would impede their ability to get a well- paid job and affect family income eventually. Additional problems such as discrimination and fear of experiencing racism prevent women from BAME groups to access mainstream services. Even though most mainstream services now claim to be 'women-centred' and 'holistic' in services offered to women it is equally true that numbers of BAME women accessing these services remains relatively low. In the interviews we were told by women that they preferred to help themselves and some explained their lack of trust in services being sensitive to their cultural and religious needs. These problems only compound the vulnerability of women.

6.4 Individual and family well-being is affected by inter-personal problems within the family. A woman told us about her experience after her son was sentenced. She said,

I was single and homeless for 8 years after my son went to prison. I loved him a lot. I suffered abuse from my husband who then left me and married another woman. I sought refuge in a women's shelter before I was finally helped by social services.



Another mother was extremely worried about the over-representation of men from her community in the prison population. In her view the young children needed better educational support and role-models. She explained,

Having a parent in prison is very hard on young impressionable kids. Not a good example. No wonder they don't do well at school. There is no motivation to do better. When our people go to prison they come out worse. What future can you expect for the young ones then?

6.5 Imprisonment adversely impacted children's educational performance and in many cases leading to truanting and exclusion from school.

His imprisonment has caused a great deal of stress to my young son. He has been truanting now. He used to be good at school when he was younger. He is worried now that he will also end up in prison. His friends tell him that they have drugs in prison and people get depressed and sometimes commit suicide. The poor lad is frightened now and does not even go to visit his Dad. It is difficult to cope. I try my best you know but I have my own health problems now. This extra worry about the kids is not doing me any good. My daughter has also left her husband now as he beats her up. You see all this stress for me. No wonder I have asthma now.

Better integrated support should be made available in the form of preventive services that are targeted to meet the needs of these groups.

6.6 For some families imprisonment led to ill-health and isolation and worry caused depression. Bereavement, in one instance, led to further isolation and neglect of other children.

After my son died I did not know what was happening around me. I was depressed, living on my own in a council flat with a young child. The people living around me thought I was a schizophrenic and sent me to in-patient care when I began to hear voices. I was still grieving for my son. The psychiatrist later apologised for putting me on medication after realising that I was suffering separation anxiety due to my son's death...I lived through some rough times but now I am back on my feet, in this old age, as best as I can. I now have my daughter to worry about who got neglected and now beginning to show some worrying behavioural problems.



6.7 Imprisonment impairs the life chances of all members of the family albeit in different ways. Muslim prisoners' experiences of resettlement show that prisoners returning to their communities face rejection by their own community and find it difficult to re-build their lives. This leaves additional pressures on parents and other siblings in the family.

My brothers got married but their marriages failed. They don't have stable jobs and they don't aspire to do anything. They claim their lives are ruined since the incident and they blame each other. They do not have any sort of relationship now. It has been hardest for my Mum who has had to cope with all this at her age. Her health has deteriorated as a result. The stigma of imprisonment has been hard on her and she has been ostracised by her own community. Due to this we had to move out of the area and my Mum had to leave all her friends/neighbours, her comfort zone for the last 18 years for somewhere she did not know. I think she has never been able to feel at home since.



7. Conclusion and recommendations

7.1 This report argues that while the UK government and the country's criminal justice apparatus wholly accept that family support for offenders reduces re-offending, neither have yet attempted to facilitate the active involvement of families in the resettlement process. At the beginning of this report we cited findings from a 1994 study on black and Asian prisoners' families and with an extract from the 2002 Social Exclusion Unit Report, *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners*. In conclusion we re-examine what has changed in light of these reports about prisoners and their families. Based on evidence from 28 families it is clear that:

- Maintaining family relationships to prevent prisoners re-offending and resettling successfully remains an aspiration for the most part. To the families, largely disengaged from the formal resettlement process, it was more about providing informal support; emotional support to re-integrate with family, guidance to access social networks, providing information and support for day-to-day needs.
- Support and advice for families was limited then and visiting facilities often inadequate. Although more support and advice is now available through voluntary sector organisations that help run visitors' centres, most families in this research said they needed more support at other stages of the criminal justice process and not just at the end of the prison sentence. Although family support organisations such as POPS now have family support worker schemes operating in courts and police custody suites it is relatively new. The other difference is the inadequacy of most services to address BAME specific needs and offer culturally sensitive services that recognise and understand families' experience of racism and disadvantage (see 6.2 and 6.3).
- Families were rarely involved in the process of tackling offending behaviour then and families interviewed in this research are still not being involved in the process (see 5.5). One family member shared with us a letter sent to the prison requesting such involvement and despite repeated attempts received no response. While involvement of family is important it remains an aspiration as opportunities to be

more involved in sentence planning are not yet being facilitated by prisons and probation services.

- Post-release support was scarce then but has slowly gained momentum in the last few years. Voluntary sector organisations understand this gap best and have actively sought to assist prisoners on release and in the transition from prison to community. Mentoring projects have benefitted numerous young people involved in the criminal justice system. However, families need to be supported too so they can help the family member upon release. The research highlights how difficult this is for the families whose existing resources to partake in post-release support are seriously limited.

7.2 In many ways this research confirms what has been highlighted before in different studies led by academics, practitioners and policy-makers. Organisations that helped in this research have all examined resettlement in relation to BAME prisoners and ex-offenders and the impact on their families. This research went a step further to study the impact on BAME families more specifically and attempted to highlight the particular concerns of hidden and marginalised groups like gypsies and travellers and foster carers.

7.3 The research examined four key issues of access, equity, barriers and improving outcomes for resettlement. It provided some evidence that families did not access resettlement services because of low levels of knowledge and awareness. At the same time it would be wrong to conclude that families did not aspire to access knowledge and guidance to help their family member. The problem about access is not about ability of families to get information or about availability – it is more to do with the timing of making the information available.

7.4 Equality of access remains problematic even after years of equality and diversity training for agency staff. Despite attempts to make the work-force more representative of the general population, service-users still experience lack of sensitivity and care in cultural and religious matters. The case for equity in relation to BAME families is well made. Family well-being is important and to ensure that all families are given opportunities and are treated fairly, the most disadvantaged groups need to be given particular attention first.

7.5 Particular barriers for BAME groups are still embedded in statistical realities – in both criminal justice and mental health statistics they are over-represented. Unless disproportionality is reduced in a targeted way, families will continue to experience the negative impact of race and discrimination. Other barriers experienced, in particular by BAME families are shame and rejection from their own community.

7.6 Most families who participated in the research were keen to engage in a constructive process to improve positive outcomes for their family members. However, successful outcomes depend on the ability of the criminal justice apparatus to individualise outputs and maintain a flexible approach to influence individual outcomes. Mentoring and coaching programmes for young people involved in the criminal justice system are good examples. However, these programmes need to run alongside support programmes for families and a public strategy to influence broader societal attitudes on prisoners and offenders. This would provide a more integrated approach to resettlement.

7.7 Based on what families told us the report makes the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1: To support offenders and their families at earlier stages in the criminal justice process especially at the court stage. This should involve Family Support workers who can work in a culturally sensitive manner. Offenders can also be supported by court-based support services provided by family members, friends and mentors.

Recommendation 2: Prison and Probation need to address and co-ordinate intervention on domestic violence. Families should be included in the process. This must also involve targeted outreach activities to reach and help family members in the community by working with smaller community-based organisations.

Recommendation 3: Families must be involved in sentence planning and prison and probation staff must listen to what families have to say. This should not be tokenistic. A nominated link person should be identified to support the family and to make sure their views about their family member are used. The nominated link person could be a volunteer and/or family member.

Recommendation 4: Provide strategic training, with the help of families, to Prison staff through Officer Entry Level Training (POELT) and through induction training at local prisons about the problems that affect BAME families; disproportionality, discrimination, dual disadvantage, shame and the impact on family well-being and resettlement outcomes. This training should be given to prison staff responsible for resettlement, community engagement, offender management, visits and equality and diversity. Similar training should also be made available for Probation, Youth Offending Service (YOS), Children and Young People's Services and schools in local areas to understand the impact of imprisonment on family members particularly on educational attainment of children from marginalised minority groups.

Recommendation 5: Better engagement by Prison, Probation and YOS with ongoing support for the more invisible minority groups in the community. These services should identify and make referrals to specific offender family support as well as other family intervention projects appropriate for BAME families.

Recommendation 6: Prisons must ensure that family visits are made more meaningful, active, fun and educational. Prisons should create a visiting environment that is friendly and welcoming to the families and their children. Prison policies and prison staff should actively promote family friendly services that are respectful and non-judgemental.

Recommendation 7: BAME families should be supported better in the community. Local authorities and local social networks should be made aware of the impact of imprisonment on families so that they are able to offer culturally appropriate counselling and coaching opportunities to families of offenders. This would enable individuals within families to address their own social and psychological problems.

Recommendation 8: Offender families' support networks should be supported by local authorities as part of promoting their family friendly agenda. BAME self-help and support groups should be encouraged and strengthened as part of this.

Recommendation 9: Further research to determine the support needs of families and carers of BAME children from the care system.

Recommendation 10: Local authorities, prison and probation should consider involving and working with BAME prisoners' families support groups to implement these recommendations at a local level.

