

THE URGENT NEED FOR BETTER PROTECTION OF CHILDREN OF OFFENDERS WHEN REPORTING A PARENT'S CRIME

Children from Liverpool are being seriously harmed as a result of negative media attention surrounding a parent's offence.

Children of prisoners are innocent victims of a crime they did not commit.

Children suffer a range of adversities when a parent or primary carer is sent to prison, including shame, stigma, isolation, loss and grief.

The trauma of parental imprisonment often leads to severe mental health disorders including sleep disorders, eating disorders, self harm, and detachment.

This traumatic early childhood event can affect children's engagement in school, due to bullying and fears of being judged. These experiences are significantly compounded by insensitive reporting in the press.

When children's personal and family circumstances are insensitively shared in media reports, children are less likely to engage in education and are more likely to be at risk of child criminal and child sexual exploitation.



"STOP PRESS"

Painting by an
11-year-old girl,
Time-Matters UK

KEY FACTS

- It is estimated that more than 3,000 children across Merseyside have a parent in prison.
- Having a parent in prison is defined by the World Health Organisation as an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE).
- Children who experience ACEs are more likely to suffer with poor mental and physical health, engage in risk-taking behaviours and die younger.
- Children of prisoners are grossly neglected by the UK government. There are no statutory support services for these children.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- When an offender has children, any details that identify a child's home address should be kept out of all online and printed press.
- The printing of an offender's surname should only be carried out with due consideration of how the child can be protected from negative attention.

RELEVANCE FOR LIVERPOOL'S CHILDREN

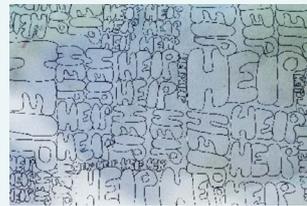
In a series of focus groups with children from Time-Matters UK in Liverpool, children have reported the damaging effect that the reporting of a parent's crime has had on their lives, which has grossly exacerbated their already traumatic experience of having a parent or primary carer sent to prison.

Children tell us:

- They have not wanted to go to school/college once the crime was reported, due to the way it was reported.
- The reporting meant that sometimes other children found out that their parent had gone to prison before they themselves and they suffered further shock and shame as a result.
- The reporting of the crime demonised their loved one in a way that compounded their grief and shame.
- Some children's homes have been subjected to violent community backlash and some children have had to leave their family home and relocate for their own safety.
- Some children have been approached by local gangs as a result of the crime being shared in the press, with gang members offering to form an alliance with the child under the guise of 'protecting' them.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- We propose that a 'child safe press' partnership be formed between Merseyside journalists, Time-MattersUK, Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership, LJMU Public Health, Liverpool City Council Safeguarding Team and the University of Liverpool children's human rights unit.
- From this partnership, a new code of press ethics should be developed that prioritises the wellbeing of children in the reporting of a parent's crime.



Drawing by a
10-year-old child,
Time-Matters UK

FURTHER INFORMATION

The Ethical Code of Practice for the Norwegian Press offers a model to consider, paying particular attention to articles 4.3, 4.6, 4.7. Available online: bit.ly/3cmH3Du

Research paper: The hidden voices of children and young people with a parent in prison Available online: bit.ly/3nr7fD4

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ABOUT THE CFC PROGRAMME

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- > [Liverpool Health Partners CFC page](#)