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Empowering Families of Prisoners

A quantitative analysis of families of prisoners' experiences of vulnerability, shame and empowerment within a Not-for-profit support organisation.

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Student Name: Mick Schroeder

Student Number: 14844289

Supervisor: Nichola Khan

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Declaration of Originality

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Abstract

Families of prisoners are faced with increasing socio-economic and emotional difficulties directly and indirectly related to the imprisonment of their family members. Throughout the years research has established that the families are part of a heavily stigmatised and marginalised community with strong vulnerabilities towards isolation and disempowerment. With the absence of official government services, the not-for-profit sector has been shown to provide the necessary support for families and play an important role in their well-being. To date no study has looked at the experiences of vulnerability and empowerment of families of prisoners in relation to not-for-profit organisations. The purpose of this qualitative study was to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences in terms of vulnerability and empowerment of families of prisoners as members of a Not-for-profit support organisation. Data was collected during 3 semi-structured face-to-face interviews. During the thematic analysis, four main themes were identified representing how participants viewed their experiences. As a whole, families considered the organisation as an essential and vital resource in re-empowering families, particularly in the absence of reliable and appropriate government services and helplines. In particular, Nfp organisations facilitated emotional support groups run by and for families, allowing families to express their distress freely, share valuable information between them, and get a renewed sense of control. The organisation created a safe space, allowing members to re-gain and re-enforce their self-identity as well as work towards transformative change in the marginalisation of families of prisoners by society and within official agencies. Recommendations for future research, in addition to the study's limitations are discussed.

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List of Abbreviations

| | | |
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| SPF | - | Sussex Prisoners' Families |
| Nfp | - | Not-for-profit organisations |

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a brief rationale and background for this research project, as well as the research question, aims and objectives. Additionally, the community psychology principles and values guiding this study are discussed. Finally, the chapter will look at the personal position of the researcher in terms of reflexivity before ending with an overall outline of the dissertation.

1.2 Background and Rationale

In the world of criminal justice prisoners are an isolated, 'far-from-society', entity outside of the concern of most people. However, prisoner's "do not exist in a vacuum" (Codd, 2008), but rather are surrounded by families who have to deal with the criminal nature of a family member, the absence of said individual, as well as providing the necessary support (Laing, 2003).

Indeed, previous research, focusing on the social reintegration of prisoners and re-offense prevention, has determined the importance of families in increasing the chances for positive post-release lives (Social Exclusion Unit Report, 2002). This research has proven to be a significant factor for the criminal justice system, offering new strategies for prisoner management. However, this has also increased the pressure for the families in being active participants and reliable support systems for the prisoners, without considering the implications of such expectations. In the UK a new wave of research on prisoners' families and children has emerged from this, reinforcing the awareness of stigmatisation and marginalisation towards the families (Condry, 2018; Comford, 2008).

In terms of the community, society's limited attitudes towards families of prisoners fall, for the majority, along the lines of "familial stain", "kin contamination", or "family blaming" (Condry, 2007). Research goes as far as considering the term, 'custodial citizens' (Condry, 2018) in relation to the social injustice towards the families and the attack on their human rights.

Help and guidance for these families is to date almost entirely dependent on a number of not-for-profit (Nfp) support organisations. Based on mostly voluntary work, these are doing their best to provide the families with legal and technical advice and information to navigate the justice system, as well allowing members to meet other families in seminal situations. However, these organisations, operating on limited funding and government support, are dependent on social and psychological research to fully understand and support the families.

Since the 1960s international research has developed a long list of ways in which imprisonment is influencing family lives and the concrete effect these families might experience (Dickie, 2013; Fishman 1983; Weaver et al., 2015). In more recent years the literature has shifted toward looking at the marginalisation and stigmatisation of the families in terms of understanding their distress and revealing a shame and blame culture. There is a significant gap in exploring the vulnerability of the families in relation to that marginalisation and stigmatisation in society and the work of Nfp Organisations in empowering families of prisoners.

Through a previous research project, conducted with a Brighton based Nfp Organisation, the researcher has highlighted the work done by the organisation in terms of empowering the families. The organisation, Sussex Prisoners' Families (SPF), offers a number of services from providing support, information and training to families and professionals to help navigate the criminal justice system and reduce stigma. The present research builds on the first study, hoping to explore the previous findings further to ultimately help the organisation in their goals to reduce stigma and help families to the best of their abilities and knowledge.

1.3 Research Question

How do prisoners' family members consider vulnerability, in terms of stigma and shame, in regard to their experiences?

How do prisoners' family members consider empowerment, in terms of connection and courage, in regard to their experiences with a Not-for-profit organisation?

1.4 Aims and Objectives

The overall purpose of this research is to develop a better understanding of families of prisoners' experiences of vulnerability and empowerment in relation to their contact with Sussex Prisoners Families. To achieve this, the objectives of this research are:

To develop a new understanding of vulnerability and shame within marginalized communities and how these concepts are positively used in supporting individuals.

1.5 Community Psychology

Community psychology attempts to "understand and enhance the quality of life for individuals, communities, and society through collaborative research and action" (Dalton et al., 2001). Using the ecological approach of micro (individual), meso (community) and macro (wider society) levels of analysis, and a non-individualistic understanding of the social context, it thrives towards social justice on a wider social scale. As opposed to mainstream psychology, community psychology asserts that individual distress is not caused by personal failing, but rather the consequence of power imbalances, marginalisation, inequality and oppression. As such, community psychologists bridge the gap between the psychological and political (Moane, 2003) in determining the relevant factors responsible for the distress amongst marginalised communities and working towards transformative change (Kagen et al., 2011).

Community psychology is based on core values guiding research and action within oppressed, marginalised and stigmatized communities. The present study was conducted using a community psychology approach, and in particular focusing on the concept of empowerment (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010).

Empowerment is the "mechanism by which people, organisations, and communities gain mastery over their affairs" (Rappaport, 1987). As an aim and outcome-oriented practice,

community psychology uses the approach to work 'with' communities rather than working 'for' communities. Prilleltensky (2008) argues that by 'obtaining, producing and enabling power', individuals and communities can increase well-being, self-determination and develop social cohesions. Working to address asymmetrical power relationships on an interpersonal, economic and socio-political level, community psychology considers empowerment an essential tool in the promotion and prevention of well-being. As a previous study (Schroeder, 2019) has shown, powerlessness is a major factor responsible of the distress of families of prisoners and is an important value within the present study.

1.6 Personal Position and Reflexivity

"Reflexivity is a form of critical thinking which aims to articulate the contexts that shape the processes of doing research and subsequently the knowledge produced"

(Lazard & McAvoy, 2017).

It is essential for researchers to be actively aware of and critically evaluate their own subjectivity and position throughout the research practice and methodology (Bott, 2010).

I, the researcher, am aware of the necessity for a researcher to be objective and remain so throughout the project. However, it is my belief that psychological research is guided by the experiences and interests of the researcher, thus making a fully objective and non-personal research nearly impossible.

As a researcher going into this project, I knew my personal experiences were the leading reasons as to why I choose this subject, but I firmly believed I could set my personal feelings and opinions aside and become a 'professional' researcher. It isn't until I got stuck in the known researcher's block that I found myself thinking back to why I started this project and why I even choose to focus on this subject. I have a sister who spent nearly 4 years in prison. I denied myself to think about this in any relation to my research and refused to take my feelings into consideration throughout this work but, by extension, I also stopped myself from really hearing the words spoken my participants and the extent of their sufferings. To them I was just another researcher wanting to know about their world, but they were blissfully unaware that every word they said, every emotion they expressed, or situation described, hit

home for me. I knew better than they ever could imagine how it feels to be the one on the other side of the bars. It doesn't matter what my sister had done, or what any of my participants family member had done; what mattered is that we shared an understanding, if only from my point of view.

Having a sister in prison isn't easy. I hated her, not for what she had done but because her action meant that she wouldn't be there to share the successes in my life or console me when I struggled. And if that wasn't hard enough, I had to be strong to support our parents, take the lead in her case and be the one to deal with the legalities, sort out the paperwork and handle both my parents and my sisters' emotional needs. People around us were fast to judge my parent's ability to raise children, to criticize their education, to blame them for my sisters' mistakes, and to consider every member of the family responsible and equally criminal. At first, I looked for support in the wider family and in my friends, although some responded with open arms, many were quick to push me back. In their eyes, I was contaminated and a bad influence for them and their environment. Slowly but surely, I discovered a world I never would have lost a thought about before, the hidden world of families of prisoners, and I realised I was now part of this rejected and discriminated community.

During my undergraduate degree in psychology and sociology, I buried my new identity like a shameful secret. I was no longer the sister of a prisoner, I was an only child.

It wasn't until my postgraduate degree in Community Psychology that I discovered the existence of an organisation who's focus is on helping and supporting the families of prisoners, and through them, met people who not only understood each other, but also people who needed help. With the help of the organisation I decided to step out of the shadow, own up to my identity and use my experience to help others in the same situation.

Although as a researcher I know that to be objective is essential, I now also know that to let some personal experience guide research, is to fully immerse oneself into it and explore its full potential. This project is guided by and focused on the words of the participants, but it has my experiences, my heart and my desire for change driving it forward.

1.7 Dissertation Outline

The second chapter will focus on reviewing existing research literature on families of prisoners, looking particularly at socio-political discriminations, the marginalisation and stigmatisation of the families, and the notions of injustice, vulnerability and shame. The chapter will then turn towards the missing perspectives of empowerment and vulnerability to bring together a strong underpinning for the research.

The third chapter describes the small-scale, qualitative research methodology used in this study, including epistemology, methodology, method, design and analysis.

Chapter four presents the findings of a thematic analysis of participants interviews and a discussion of the findings. Each theme generated by the analysis will be closely described and discussed and brought in relation with community psychology principles and the theoretical background initially laid out.

The fifth chapter summarises the findings of the research, including a the limitations of the study as well as directions for future research before closing the chapter with a final conclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide an examination of the existing research literature on the marginalisation and stigmatisation of families of prisoners, specifically looking at research findings on the vulnerability, oppression and discrimination of families on all ecological levels of analysis as well as their interconnectivity. Thereafter this chapter will look at the support available to the families paying close attention to researches findings around the empowerment of families within the context of not-for-profit organisations.

2.2 Defining Families of Prisoners and Related Terms

In academic literature a single term can have a number of different meanings and uses depending on various factors, such as the researcher's approach towards a topic or the socio-historical and political context. For the purpose of this study the researcher has defined the main terms present in this research.

The majority of research on families of prisoners' have defined families as married couples with children and focused their study on the incarcerated husbands (Carlson and Cervera, 1991) and mothers as the sole care givers for their children (Hungerford, 1993). Alternatively, a far less popular approach looks at incarcerated mothers (Bloom and Steinhart, 1993). Research suggests, however, that the family network of a prisoner extends beyond the traditional nuclear family model and includes a significant number of unmarried parents (Mumola, 2000), children with multiple partners or non-biological children (Hairston, 1991) and siblings (Meek, 2008). It has also been debated whether close friends of prisoners' and their families should be included in the term 'families of prisoners' (Brodsky, 1975). Within the context of the present study the researcher considers the term family as 'any individual directly or indirectly involved in the support of a prisoner(s) and/or affected in some capacity or another by a prisoner's incarceration', thus also choosing to include friends.

The present study also expressed the importance of the family as an existing unit outside of the prison context and emphasises the need for family members to be defined and

empowered as their own individual, unrelated to their relation status with a prisoner. Codd (2008) argues that the term 'prisoners' families' can have a negative annotation, placing "the prisoners in a possessive position" (p5). As such, while there is no alternative terminology appropriate for the present study, the present study will continue to use 'prisoners' family' but emphasising the family rather than prisoner-based perspective.

In this study vulnerability is used in the context of marginalisation and stigmatisations in reference to communities who are oppressed because of factors outside of their control, rather than their individual weaknesses. Vulnerable populations often suffer from disempowerment and "lack a voice in regard to what they need and how these needs could be met" (Codd, 2008, p250).

2.3 Economical and Emotional Instability

Prisons, in the modern sense of places of incarceration designed to hold large numbers of inmates for prolonged periods of time, have existed since the sixteenth century. Most of the research conducted concerning the subject has focused on prisons as an institution of punishment, and the effects of incarceration of prisoners.

Pauline Morris' pioneering social research in 1965, on the consequences of incarceration on a prisoner's family, identified one of the biggest issues faced by the families as their economic instability directly caused by the imprisonment (Philip, 1985). The link between poverty and imprisonment has since been strongly supported in the research literature (Smith et al., 2007), agreeing that the majority of families face financial loss and additional expenses (Hairston, 2003). The financial strain is visible at all stages of the incarceration, from lawyer fees and sending money to prison, to financing the family life outside of prison without a second income (Codd, 2008). Morris (1965) documented the high levels of anxiety families experience about money, especially for stay-at-home mothers who previously held little responsibility over the family's financial situation. He also points out that while this is the case for the majority of the families, the incarceration of a family member, such as a gambling parent, can significantly improve the financial situation. While this argument is essential, it is

important to notice that prisoners who did not provide a financial income for the family were often a financial burden and had collected high amounts of debts which naturally fall back on the families (Davis, 1992). These families faced with debt collectors and the belief that they are legally responsible, are vulnerable to becoming easy targets (Codd, 2008). This relates back to social research on the connection between poverty and marginalisation of low-class families and communities (Milbourne, 2004). A financial strain, or low economic situation, can rapidly transform into a social vulnerability and have devastating consequences for the safety and stability of a family. This helplessness is heightened as the remaining parent is forced to compensate for both the lack of a second income and the absence of a child-carer. Mothers have expressed feelings of being trapped in a hopeless circle between not being able to pay for full-time childcare and also needing to work (Codd, 2008). These effects are furthered if the family maintains its family ties with the incarcerated member. Whilst some of the financial burden might be lifted if the ties were severed, research (Harrison, 2003) has found that families were hesitant to do this due to their shared emotional bond. Interestingly, Davis' research also found that once a prisoner is released, partners do not report feeling a stronger sense of financial security (1992). It could be speculated that this is due to the partner having re-organised their independence and are no longer dependant on the partner for stability by the time they are released.

As the financial burdens carried by the families were revealed, research, simultaneously, started focusing on the emotional well-being of the families. Early on, Lowenstein (1984) found high levels of stress and anxiety amongst partners of prisoners. Their relationships are severely impacted by the stress of separation and the lack of privacy and intimacy during the incarceration (Codd, 2002; Lowenstein, 1984). Statistics have shown that 22% of married prisoners divorce or separate as a direct consequence of imprisonment (Salmon, 2007). A number of studies support the argument on the vulnerability of the marital and parental bond during incarceration (Daniel & Barrett, 1981; Koenig, 1985). On the one hand they have to deal with the criminal nature of their family member and the implications of this in terms of their moral beliefs. On the other hand, they have to consider their desire to maintain the family bond despite the criminal offence (Codd, 2002). Codd (2008) argues that the family bond, and the desire to maintain that bond, are in most cases found to be stronger than the criminal offence. Additionally, she argues that if, for example, a prisoner's wife would sever

the relationship, 'she cannot return to her previous status of never having been married to a prisoner' (Codd, 2008, p23).

The well-being of prisoners and the likelihood of them not re-offending has been found to strongly correlate with the relationship with their families (Social Exclusion Uni Report, 2002). Families have indicated being aware of their importance for the family member and, despite the economical and emotional challenge this poses, expressed their need to 'be there' and support them (Akhurst et al., 1995). It is important to note here that research has shown that imprisonment can have a positive impact on a family. For instance, Eddy & Reid (2003), have found that the imprisonment of a drug-using parent can remove a negative influence on the remaining parent and offer a greater stability and care for the children. A similar outcome can be found in case where the crime was committed within and towards the family. Comfort (2007) even argues that the imprisonment of a male partner can offer women the possibility to regain a sense of control and empowerment in their life. While it is necessary to point out the existence of such cases and consider their relevance in the research of families of prisoners, it is also essential to notice that these factors only apply to a limited number of cases and themselves are still faced with secondary problems such as the absence of a financial income and child support.

2.4 Stigma, Social Injustice and Human Rights

Each year in the United Kingdom over 310,000 children are affected by parental incarceration, dramatically affecting their education, health, poverty, and social disadvantages (Kincaid et al., 2019). Whilst a parent is in custody, society invisibly projects an expectation for the other parent, in most cases mothers, to fulfil the role of both parents (Schneller, 1976). Being faced with the economic and emotional instability previously mentioned, families turn toward their wider community for help. Davis (1992), argues that at first, the families are primarily worried about establishing themselves in this 'new world of loss and uncertainty' (p77).

"It could be argued that imprisonment is now so common that it bears no stigma"
(Codd, 2008, p14).

Braman's (2004) ethnographic work in the United States revealed that, in most cases, the higher the imprisonment rates in a community, the higher the level of criminal victimisation. It would make sense for those communities with high imprisonment rates to support each other, instead however, the affected families are further shamed and blamed. Condry (2007) discusses in her ethnography, the 'web of shame' surrounding the families, in regard to their relationship with a prisoner. She describes the concept of criminal transmission, both on a biological and social level, as painting families to be identical to the offenders, sharing a genetic connection or 'tarred with the same brush' (Condry, 2018, p30). This is particularly visible in the media and press, playing a major role in the public's perception of the wives, partners and parents of prisoners. In the case of Maxine Carr, who gave a false alibi on behalf of her partner, convicted for murder and incarcerated, the media compared her actions, and herself as an individual, directly with Myra Hindly, a woman convicted for the abduction and murder of a number of children (Jewkes. 2005). Although it was later revealed that Maxine Carr testified following years of mental and physical abuse from her partner, the media and public failed to see her as a victim but rather continued to perceive her as an equal to Myra Hindly.

Women in particular suffer as easy targets for society to blame as 'poor parenting' and 'bad mothering', as well as an idea of 'she must have known' (Codd, 2008). As either partners or mothers, women are often made responsible for the criminal behaviours of men. Jewkes (2005) calls out this gendered stigmatisation, arguing that it is harder to find examples of male partners or fathers being treated similarly.

Condry's(2007) study also showed that the continuation of a relationship with an offender after sentencing can intensify the shame and blame from society. However, severing the relationship does not lessen the stigma, and in some cases the families are then also blamed for 'abandoning their family member'. This is the case for a Lancashire family, who disowned their son for sending obscene and harassing texts to female colleagues. Although they severed their relationship, they were still publicly shamed in the media and their house later targeted with abusive graffiti (Lancashire Evening Post, 2006).

Prisoners and their families are statistically more likely to come from an already low economic and social background, magnified by the imprisonment, a categorisation Condry (2007) labels as the 'cumulative disadvantage'. The affiliative status of families excludes them in the eye of

society from deserving the same help as other families with similar socio-economic challenges. They don't receive the same attention as homeless people, substance users or other unemployed individuals (Walker and McCarthy, 2005). Organisations, the media, or anyone attempting to provide support and raise funds for families of prisoners, as opposed to victims and families of victims, are seen by the media and the public as 'soft on crime and pro-criminal' (Codd, 2008, p35). Condry (2007) assimilates this to the public's belief that unlike the others, they are 'responsible for their own fate', or are themselves criminal. Following Young's (1990) argument on enabling oppression, families are unjustly treated, simply because they are continuously referred to and defined by their status as a prisoner's family member. Condry (2018) states that families of prisoners are unrightfully categorized as 'criminals', rather than, as the victims they really are. They are being punished for crimes they did not commit and are often themselves victims of the crimes committed by their family member (Condry, 2018, p32).

"No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home and correspondence, nor to attack upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law" (International Human Rights Act, 1948)

From a social and political point of view, the Human Rights Act sets out clear instructions and guidance to treating individuals and families. However, in the case of families of prisoners, those rights are, in the eyes of the wider society, no longer deemed necessary and fair. Condry (2018) notes the connection between social justice and human rights, as neither of those are being considered when it comes to families of prisoners. Instead, families of prisoners have become those 'who are at the border of our communities, those with whom we feel no sympathy, and whose actions we cannot understand' (Codd, 2008, p36). Hudson (2006) describes those individuals as being de-humanized by society, stripped from their basic human rights, and categorising them as 'monsters' and 'aliens'. The media and society transmit and encourage this idea of the family as a monster, transmitting monster-hood through generations. Coyle (2001) pleads that to discriminate and commit social injustice and oppression is to go against the basic human rights, and thus against all and any respect for humanity.

2.5 Historical Discrimination and the Punishment of 'Custodial Citizens'

In the interest of reducing the prison population the justice system is actively researching factors responsible for the increased likelihood of someone to commit criminal actions, whilst also decreasing the re-offence statistics. The Social Exclusion Uni Report, published in 2002, identified the positive role families play in the resettlement and re-offence of prisoners (2002). This encouraged the justice system to develop new strategies on dealing with the re-entry of prisoners into society and developing new solutions to the after-prison support. A major problem caused by the publication and use of the report is the increased pressure and expectations this put on the families of prisoners. Codd (2008) notes that the official agencies are setting the example for a society and are responsible for providing support and advice for their citizens.

The discrimination of families emerges from a long history of political and social injustice whereby families were directly compared, or considered complicit, to the crimes of their family member. In the Neo-Nazi era of Germany, the Third Reich installed the Sippenhaft system, which automatically considered families of political offenders as equally criminal, justified by bloodlines and genetics (Codd, 2008, p16). Later in history, after the 9/11 attacks on New York, the British government attempted to put in place an anti-terrorist legislation allowing for any person genetically or socially related to a terrorist to be detained as equally guilty. Although this legislation didn't make it through the final approval stages and was never put into action, it contributed to the public's perception of families of prisoners as potentially dangerous and shameful. In certain countries in Africa it is still common practice today for mothers, sisters and partners of individuals suspected or involved in political coups to be rejected from society, maimed, detained or killed.

In today's western society the political discrimination towards the families is executed through less obvious and publicly visible channels than during the European slavery or the Third Reich. Such as in the case of Kirk Dickson, a convicted murderer serving a life sentence since 1994. Dickson and his wife, married in 2001, requested artificial insemination in order to have a child, arguing that the potential earliest release date of Dickson in 2009 would be too late for them to have a child considering their age. The British government had denied their request on the bases of the child's ability to have a normal upbringing, however this

decision was later rejected by the European Court of Human Rights as it directly violated European Convention of Human Rights' article on the right to respect for private and family life. Cases like this can lead to the public questioning whether prisoners should be allowed to parent a child and by extension, if the criminal nature of an individual can be genetically passed on. Additionally, this refers back to Condry's (2018) idea of disrespect to the human rights of the families. Not only does the state directly go against their human rights, but sets out to punish innocent citizens, justified by their idea of the 'criminal by association' (Codd, 2008).

Agozino (2000) argues that the "victimisation as mere punishment" is the direct result of the African holocaust, otherwise known as European slavery, and highlights the extent of the race-class-gender issues in relation to crime and power relations within society today.

In the eye of society, the criminal justice system, such as the police, judges, court and prison staff, serves to protect them and are therefore granted a certain respect. The legal system is representative of the 'common conscious' (Durkeim, 1984), with punishment used on the 'obscure minority' of citizens in violation of the social morals. Condry (2018) however points out that families of prisoners are not a minority, but far outnumber prisoners, yet their rights and identity are not protected by the legal and criminal system. Smith (2014) argues that by punishing a prisoner, the legal system directly punishes the family, such as their right to privacy and a family life. Prisoners are given the right to receive visits, whereas families have their right to visit taken away. Punishing a prisoner in a majority of cases involves refusing the family visits, often essential in the maintaining of the family bond or the children's well-being.

In line with the previous argument on the attack on the family's basic human rights, Lerman and Weaver (2014) call this the 'custodial citizenship by proxy' (p8). This is often the case during prison visiting times, particularly around the processing and searching of visitors. Similar, to airport security, prisoners and visitors are submitted to a full body searches, including a pat-down from the prison staff. Hutton stated that this further develops the stigma towards the families as they are seen as equally untrustworthy by the system, and by extension society. Innocent families are exposed and submitted to the power of prisons and

have reported being treated in-humanly and looked down upon by the staff (Condry, 2007).

In the case of *Wainwright vs UK*, where the mother and brother of a prisoner were inappropriately strip searched by the prison staff, including being fully undressed, having their genitals inappropriately touched, and being humiliated and exposed in a public matter. While the prison had set rules and guidance for searching visitors, they were not respected and resulted in both individuals suffering from PTSD, and as a result unable to visit their family member again. Their case was unsuccessfully taken through multiple courts, including the county court, appeal judgment and the House of Lords judgment. Throughout the processes, the defendant stated that their status as prison visitors was enough to justify the search and they were given the option to not be searched on the understanding that they would then not be allowed to visit their family member. Only the European court of human rights concluded that the article 3 and 8, 'the right not to be subjected to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment' and 'the right to privacy and family', had been infringed. Additionally, the ECoHR found that the UK had breached Article 13, 'the right to an effective remedy in the national court'. This shows that the social justice system of the UK had neither given the family a fair judgement in court, nor did they respect the fundamental dignity of un-convicted members of the public. Instead, as pointed out by the ECoHR, they were unjustifiably treated as prisoners themselves. The treatment of the Wainwright family is representative of the treatment families receive during their prison visits and how they are exposed to the power of prisons. This disempowerment of the families is furthered by the apparent difference in treatment between social and official visitors to the prison. Official visitors, such as lawyers, or prison staff themselves are not systematically submitted to searches. The rules in prison allow for an element of discretion in how prison staff decide to treat official visitors.

Comfort concludes that the status of 'family of prisoners' profoundly affects the citizenship of the families as they no longer benefit from a supposedly legitimate and fair political and social system. "Having a family member incarcerated can have enduring repercussions for socio-political attitudes, behaviours and perceptions" (2014, p45). Furthermore, King & McDermott (1995) argue that the more families are involved with formal agencies, the more disempowered those families become.

2.6 Supporting Families of Prisoners

Research suggests that the support families receive from their direct social environment, such as the extended family, relatives, and their close community is the most important as it is the first line of contact for them. Their active support is essential in helping the families cope with the sentencing, as well as compensate for the physical absence and lack of financial income. Families have stated feeling a great level of support from their friends and neighbours, particularly in relation to prison visits, as they would provide childcare, transport and financial aids. However, as Codd (2008) argues, this support is not automatic and is not the case for most families. When the offence has taken place within the family or harmed the community, the families are often rejected and further shamed. This is also the case where the offence was of a shocking nature, in which case friends and relatives are more likely to withdrawal their support and end their relationship.

As a first step towards getting practical advice, information, and support, families orientate themselves toward government websites and official agencies. Previously families were welcomed by the probation service, however, after some penal policy changes, the probation officers have refocused their work almost entirely towards managing offenders only and no longer include families (Condry & Smith, 2018). The official government website in the UK directs families towards the National Prisoners' Families helpline, an initiative run by the Prison Advice and Care Trust (Pact), a national charity. This is highly representative of how families are not being supported through official channels and are having to seek out individual services for each of the problems connected to the imprisonment of a family member. Fee (2015) has denounced the non-existence of services in the UK for families of prisoners, or any policies and legislations in response to the particular needs related to the imprisonment of a family member.

Research has shown that the most available and complete support for families is provided by charities and the not-for-profit sectors (Goldsmith & Bryne, 2018; Codd, 2008). Some of these are specifically aimed at supporting families of prisoners, while other include the families as part of specific social problems, such as drug dependency or single parenthood. Since the 1960s a number of organisations exists throughout the UK specifically established to support

and advice families of prisoners, such as the Partners of Prisoner and Family Support Groups (POPS) in Manchester or the national Action for Prisoners' Families (APF). These organisations function for the most part on a 'by family members for family members' principle and provide help for the families on different aspects of the difficulties related to imprisonment. As mentioned previously, a major issue faced by the families is the lack of information and advice about the various aspects related to imprisonment from official agencies and government institutions. A number of organisations work in collaboration with prisons and different justice system agencies, serving as a bridge with the families. In doing so, organisations are able to provide the necessary help or guidance for families to receive emotional and material support as well as navigate the criminal justice system.

2.6.1 Empowerment

A recurring theme throughout research on the work of self-help groups and organisations is the empowerment of the families and the development of resilience to their vulnerability. Nfp Organisations have shown to provide families with the possibility to regain their "social status and identity previously tainted by their relationship with a prisoner" (Codd, 2008, p143). Codd proposes that support groups create an empowering environment for families beyond providing help and support, such as Action for Prisoners' Families who provide a critical voice on behalf of prisoners' families. Limited qualitative research has found that these organisations create safe spaces for families suffering from the emotional isolation and the feelings of shame (Hartworth at al., 2016), empowering their members to help them regain their sense of community and social cohesion (Codd, 2008). These organisations thus provide powerful spaces where families of prisoners can "express emotions and concerns to others who will not judge" without stigma, or fear of stigma, while connecting with others.

In her qualitative research on 'the feminists' perspective on self-help groups for prisoners' partners' (2002), Codd explores the "theoretical framework for understanding the significance and value of group membership" (p334). Early on, her study revealed that women who are in contact with self-help groups have more positive outlooks on their situation as opposed to women who are not in contact with any organisations. These women expressed strong feelings of emotional support none-judgmental and welcoming attitudes within the

group due to the shared experiences. Codd argues that self-help groups enable them to maintain of their positive self-identities within the context of social expectations of women as caregivers. Furthermore, the study revealed the importance self-help groups play in promoting members' self-esteem both in coping with the long-term impact of imprisonment and in preparing them for a prisoners' release.

What is missing from here is a greater understanding of family's experiences of vulnerability and empowerment in relation to the work of Nfp Organisations. The next section will investigate the theoretical interpretations of the role of these groups in terms of developing empowerment.

2.7 Missing perspective: Empowering families of prisoners

Research has found that organisations play an essential role in the support of families of prisoners (Codd, 2008; Condry, 2007). Their work has proven to positively affect families of prisoners on a practical and emotional level and serve as a strong empowerment role for families of prisoners'. Codd (2002) suggests in her study the need for further research on the social and political marginalisation and the empowerment of families of prisoners within the context of self-help groups. Additionally, she suggests the development of theoretical interpretations of the role of these groups.

A recent study (Schroeder, 2019), from which the present study emerges, explores the empowerment of families of prisoners within SPF, a not-for-profit organisation in Brighton, UK. The study explored how the organisation has supported families of prisoners, the outcome of this support, and the impact of their engagement with the services. The qualitative research findings reported three major themes in how the families felt empowered: Compassion, courage and change. The organisation provides an essential link between the families and their wider social environment, giving them back a sense of control in this "new world of loss and uncertainty" (Davis, 1992, p77). By facilitating a space 'for families by families' to share information and advice, they are able to create a sense of purpose and usefulness for families, "supporting one can also empower another' (Schroeder, 2019, p15). Finally, the research revealed that in the eyes of the families, the organisation

serves as a platform for social change. Disempowered as a consequence of the social marginalisation and oppression, families expressed their feelings of support and encouragement from the organisation to demand change in prison policies and fight discrimination and oppression.

Families repeatedly reported feeling empowered through a strong sense of shared vulnerability within the safe space provided by the organisation. On a wider social level, Codd (2002) argues that through the help of organisations, families who are made “vulnerable to poverty, loneliness, social stigmatisation” adopt strategies of resilience to that vulnerability in order to overcome the “economic hardship, emotional and personal difficulties, social stigma and oppressive institutional practices” as well as “actively resist disempowerment, marginalisation and invisibility” (p342).

The concept of vulnerability has previously been found in direct relation to empowerment within marginalised communities. Stoneberg (2008) found in his study on male identity formation that finding a safe space to explore vulnerability can lead to healing and empowerment particularly in relation to stigma and social oppression. Brown (2018) theorised that “acknowledged vulnerability, critical awareness and empathic relationships” are at the core of resilience and empowerment.

Evidence suggest that the empowerment of families of prisoners is closely related to the development of resilience by giving them the freedom to explore and express their vulnerability. The findings of studies on families of prisoners, have communally agreed on the ability for self-help groups and organisations to support families effectively and empower them through a number of different aspects. Whether families of prisoners have developed resilience to stigma and shame within the context of an organisation remains to be seen.

2.8 Summary

Existing literature on families of prisoners, largely from qualitative methodological approaches, demonstrate the extent of the marginalisation, stigmatisation and oppression on all ecological levels. The literature reveals how the suffering of families evolves into an endless

cycle of personal emotional and moral suffering to the robbery of their social identities through their unjustified punishment by official agencies.

Nfp Organisations have proven to be one of, if not the, most essential support available for families. Studies have shown that their work goes beyond providing advice and information, such as creating a safe space to explore and express their emotions and rebuilding their sense of identity. Research has shown that organisations empower their members and help them rebuild their self-esteem and self-identity.

Families of prisoners' and Nfp Organisations are dependent on social researches to help them improve their situation and guide their work. As such, this provides a unique opportunity to provide a qualitative investigation into the empowerment of families through help organisations.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The present chapter focuses on the methodological approach taken in this study.

Firstly, the theoretical framework of the study will be outlined, including the transformative paradigm used in terms of ontological and epistemological approaches. Following on from this, the recruitment strategy, participants, data collection and analysis methods will be discussed. Next, the chapter addresses the ethical considerations as well as any significant inclusion and exclusion characteristics. Finally, an example of the researcher's reflexivity process is demonstrated followed by a chapter conclusion.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

Early research with families of prisoners has established that families face the same social disapproval as offenders (Peelo et al., 1991) and their distress is in majority caused by social factors. In addition, with the power imbalances between the families, the justice system and the wider community, it appropriately fits the transformative paradigm.

The transformative paradigm focuses on "research that incorporated a social justice orientation and advocacy for marginalized community voices" (Jackson et al., 2018), by analysing asymmetric power relationships, working towards social action and thriving towards social justice. As the present study works with families of prisoners in terms of discrimination and vulnerability from the outside society, the transformative paradigm highly relates the methodological direction throughout the research.

Ontologically, the transformative paradigm focuses on power considerations, rejecting "cultural relativism, while at the same time recognizing the influence of privilege in determining what is perceived to be real and the consequences of accepting one version of reality over another" (Mertens, 2010). This study related to the power imbalances within society, how these affect marginalised communities, and ultimately how the concept of power is essential within researching solutions towards social change. As such, it fits within the transformative paradigm and the ontological assumption that the consideration of

historical, economical, socio-political, and moral concerns, as well as race, gender, age and disabilities, are essential in the understanding of the reality of social structures.

Epistemologically, transformative paradigm argues that the relationship between the researcher and the participant is essential to establish a good understanding to the social and historical influences within any particular cultural context.

Transformative paradigm argues that a mixed method approach can lead to a significant enhancement of the validity of a research in terms of “integral connection between the quality of the human relations in research settings and the validity of the information that is produced” (Kirkhart, 2005). The transformative paradigm notes the importance of qualitative research methods, to “establish a dialogue between the researchers and the community members” (Mertens, 2009, p59). Codd (2008) argues that within the last five years, quantitative research around families of prisoners has significantly increased, developing a strong understanding of the extent of the issue. However, from a qualitative point of view, Murray (2005) points out a lack of detailed research and emphasises the importance of such research. The present study uses purely qualitative methods, to allow for more in-depth conversations with participants and around the subject of empowerment and vulnerability. Following the transformative paradigm assumption of establishing a strong connection between the researcher and the participants, a qualitative approach has been deemed highly appropriate and favourable to understand families of prisoner’s sense of vulnerability and empowerment within the community and in working with an organisation.

3.3 Recruitment and Sampling

Research with families of prisoners has previously proven to be a challenging and delicate task, given the vulnerable status of the families (Goldsmith & Byrne, 2018). The community is discriminated and stigmatized against from the outside society, thus making them wary of strangers and outsiders (Codd, 2008). The families themselves are more than often still dealing with the situation, and their emotions on a personal level, and are therefore not suitable or willing to take part in research. The community in itself is hard-to-find and relatively dispersed geographically, adding to the challenge. The main strategy used to

overcome these challenges was to work in close partnership with a local organisation, SPF, focused on working with families of prisoners.

The present study is additionally a continuation, or second part, to a previous study the researcher had completed with the same organisation, this meant that the participants from the previous study could be contacted directly by the researcher and invited to take part in the present study. The study recruited participants using a combination of convenience and voluntary sampling.

Other participants were recruited using a number of approaches, such as posting the research flyer on the organisation's website, social media, online forum and shared during their members monthly meetups. Using online recruitment has been acknowledged as a favourable method of recruitment for vulnerable and discriminated communities within social research (McDermott & Roen, 2012). While using the organisation as a gatekeeper, allowed for easier access to families, it could, most importantly, be assured that the potential participants have a strong and stable support system in place and had someone outside the study to talk to if they needed to. The organisation, knowing their families' situations, could directly contact those families they believed to be particularly suitable or potentially interested in taking part in a research study. Considering the nature and subject of the study, participants were all part of the organisation and had been in contact with them for a significant amount of time. This also added an additional level of safety and protection in working with a vulnerable and marginalised community, for both the participants and researcher. Finally, participants were also reached through word of mouth within the organisation. Participants who had already agreed or completed the study also shared their experience with people they knew or thought would be suitable for the study.

The sample size ultimately depended on the availability and willingness for families to participate, as well as the resources and availability of the researcher, contributing to the convenience and voluntary nature of the sampling. The dependability on these factors meant that the sample recruited was unlikely to be representative of the community as a whole. While this has been the case in the present study, a number of factors outside of the researchers' ability to recruit a representative sample can be identified. Previous studies with

families of prisoners' have shown that the individuals willing to take part in research about the subject are more likely to be female participants as men have a harder time admitting and expressing their distress. This can relate back to the concept of hegemonic masculinity and their reluctance to join organisations as they don't believe they need help (Codd, 2008). Furthermore, while there are clear records of the information about prisoners' in terms of gender, age or racial status, the same cannot be said about families of prisoners' making it harder to define and assemble a representative sample. Previous studies with families of prisoners' have shown a generally significantly female sample, which has also been found in the present study.

3.4 Participants

The present study has aimed to recruit between 10 to 15 participants, however it had quickly become clear that this would not be a possibility due to the willingness and availability, as well as the suitability of the organisation's members. Additionally, due to the international health crisis (Covid-19), a number of scheduled interviews had to be cancelled. Because of the vulnerability of the potential participants and the sensitive nature of the topic, interviews could not be carried out over the phone or Skype.

In total 7 participants had been recruited for this study, following the inclusive and exclusive guidelines predefined. However, due to Covid-19, interviews had to be canceled, thus only 3 interviews were carried out. All participants were over the age of 18 and at the time of the study did not experience any severe mental health concerns. Additionally, all participants had been in contact with the organisation for a minimum of 6 month and their family member had not been prisoners for less than 6 months. All participants identified as female and included one sister, one partner and five mothers. The table below provides a summary of the participants information.

Table Participant information

| Participants | Pseudonym | Gender | Relation to Prisoners |
|--------------|-----------|--------|-----------------------|
| 1 | Bella | Female | Sister |
| 2 | Ana | Female | Mother |
| 3 | Charlie | Female | Mother |

3.5 Data Collection

This study used a qualitative methods approach to collect the data consisting of semi-structured, face-to-face, one-to-one interviews. While quantitative research has an important role of demonstrating the amplitude of the problematic on a statistical level (Murray & Farrington, 2008), Codd (2008) argues that it is equally important to hear the stories and present the experiences of families as more than names among hundreds of numbers. To really understand and explain the challenged faced by the families, the present study chooses a quantitative approach in line with previous research around the lives of families of prisoners' (Smith et al., 2007).

One interview was carried out at the organisations' office in Brighton, in a pre-booked meeting room, with staff members of the organisation available in the building to offer support for participant should they want it. Two interviews were carried out in a public space, in particular quiet coffee shops, as the participants had expressed their desire to be part of the study but could not travel to the office for personal reasons. These participants had taken part in the first study, and thus were comfortable doing the interviews outside the office. Additionally, the organisation was still available to them over phone or e-mail.

The interviews lasted between 30 minutes to an hour, with an additional 30 minutes pre and post interview conversation to ensure the participants felt comfortable and safe.

A list of questions and topics (see Appendix) were used by the researcher to guide the semi-structured interviews. The questions were based around the experiences of the participants as families of prisoners and being part of the organisation focusing on their feelings of empowerment, shame, vulnerability and courage. While the questions were used as a

framework, the interviews were carried out in the form of a discussion, allowing the participants to interpret and answer the question more comfortably. Furthermore, this left the researcher with the opportunity to explore certain answers in more details and be receptive to alternative ideas and concepts. The interviews were audio-recorded, with the permission of the participants, and stored on the university one-drive server or the researcher's password protected laptop. The interviews were then transcribed using the university transcription program, allowing a first read through and to start the analysis process.

3.5 Data analysis

The data was analysed by the research using thematic analysis. This form of analysis, a commonly used form of qualitative data analysis within psychology research, involving "identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes')" and "can be applied across a range of theoretical frameworks and research paradigms" (Braun & Clarke, 2016). Thematic analysis has been praised for its unique flexibility in being adaptable to a wide range of data sets and samples (Braun & Clarke, 2016) and offering the researcher the ability to capture both explicit and underlying meanings. Although this methodology has been criticised for lacking in clear procedure, it allows the researcher to immerse themselves fully into the data and identify key codes and themes related to the research question and theoretical framework.

In the present study, the process of thematic analysis started during the transcription of the interviews, where general ideas and concepts were noted by the researcher. During the first stages of analysis, the researcher has highlighted interesting elements within the raw data, creating codes, using a theory-driven approach. After creating a thematic map of the codes and summary of the transcripts, these were then sorted and combined into overarching themes, making sure to acknowledge any codes contradicting the research aims and theoretical bases. The process of analysis involved a continuous cycle of revisiting codes and refining themes following Patton's (1990) idea of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. A last thematic map was created to present the final themes in relation to the

research questions, theoretical framework, and the existing literature on families of prisoners and their experiences of vulnerability and empowerment working with the organisation (Appendix)

Finally, compelling extracts from each theme were chosen to be presented within the study report.

3.6 Ethical considerations

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Social Sciences CREC at the University of Brighton. To ensure the safety of the participants and the researcher, a number of ethical considerations were put in place. Prior to the interviews, participants were given information sheets about the study and the opportunity to ask any questions to the researcher or talk to a member of staff of the organisation. Additionally, participants were assured their participation was fully voluntary and their interviews were confidential and anonymous. All participants were given a consent form to sign and informed that they could decline to participate or withdraw from the study at any study during the interview or for a period of up to two weeks after, as the interviews were transcribed anonymously.

Due to the sensitive subject and potentially vulnerable individuals, the study aimed to exclude any participants who could be at high risk of experiencing distress. Although this was taken into account during participant recruitment, it could not be completely assured. As such, a contingency plan was put in place by the researcher in co-operation with SPF, to have support in place should participants feel distress or need assistance. During the interviews for this study, none of the participants have made use of these services and expressed feeling comfortable and safe throughout the process.

3.7 Summary

In conclusion, this chapter has outlined the methodological approach for the present study, based on the research aims and objective presented in the previous chapter. In particular, the chapter has justified the transformative paradigm, and the corresponding ontological and epistemological approach chosen for this study. After detailing the recruitment strategy,

participants, data collection and analysis methods, the chapter moved on to exploring the ethical considerations related to the study. Moving on, the next chapter will focus on the findings and the discussion of the study.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

The present chapter provides the thematic analysis of participants' experiences and understandings of Nfp organisations, specifically Sussex Prisoners Families, in terms of their contribution towards empowering families of prisoners. A significant part of the discussion revolves around the sense of identity as a family member, in relation to their marginalisation and stigmatisation. The four themes presented below demonstrate the relationship participants viewed between Nfp organisation, identity re-definition and re-enforcement, and empowerment. The four themes were: (1) Nfp organisation as unique and essential support systems for families of prisoners, (2) Nfp organisations as facilitators of emotional support groups by and for families, (3) Nfp organisations as facilitators of re-definition and re-enforcement of self-identity in the adversity of a shame and blame society, and (4) Nfp organization as encouraging and supporting transformative change.

Each theme is accompanied with relevant extract examples. Participants' pseudonyms are provided in the findings, along with their familial relation to a prisoner.

4.2 Nfp Organisations as Unique and Essential Support Systems for Families of Prisoners

Participants all stated in unison that there is little to no support available for families outside of the not-for-profit sector that focuses on supporting and helping families throughout the various aspects involved with imprisonment. They reported feeling strongly discriminated against and marginalised from society and official agencies. Families compared their situation with that of victims and families of victims, arguing that the support towards the victims is automatic and recognised whereas families of prisoners are being ignored and misinformed. Government agencies were particularly criticised by the families due to the lack of cohesion between services, with families being continuously referred on to other services. One participant described their experience attempting to get information from an official support helpline:

“Everybody [government agencies and prisons] would tell you a different thing. One person would tell you ‘yes they can have this this and this’, next person would say ‘no you can’t’, next person ‘oh maybe’, next person ‘oh yes, oh no’. There is no set list. There is no nothing. [...] It’s like swimming in a swimming pool and not being able to reach the side. “

(Ana, mother)

Another participant added:

“I’ve seen it so many times in murder trials, where the family of the victim have got everybody with them. And then you got one couple sitting on the other side looking like a deer caught in the headlights. So frightened. Sometimes even more members of the families, it’s just so uneven.”

(Charlie, mother)

Support services for families of prisoners are very limited and usually only exist as a sub-service within wider socio-economic support services, and as a result, families are left feeling alone and lost (Condry, 2007). Because of this situation, participants expressed the important change they experienced when finding the Nfp organisation in the not-for-profit sector. While some were approached by volunteers of the organisation and others found the organisation online, both felt an instant sense of relief and comfort knowing there was someone out there that could help.

“I just didn’t know what to do. I didn’t know who to call. Literally he was taken away from the court and that was it. Luckily, one of the guys [volunteers] in the court saw me hysterically crying and gave me a SPF card. I phoned them and they started pointing me in the right direction. I don’t know what I would have done if somebody hadn’t given me that card.”

(Ana, mother)

For participants, the organisation provided an essential and vital support in very uncertain and desperate times. The volunteers at the court were especially described as being a much appreciated and welcomed comfort as they were able to provide important information as well as directions to the procedures and steps to follow. These findings support the previous research on the lack of official government services (Condry & Smith, 2018) and the importance of the work of Nfp organisations in helping families of prisoners (Goldsmith & Bryne, 2018). Particularly, participants insisted on the ability for the organisation to provide information about criminal justice services and prisons rules and guidance, which government services themselves were unable to provide. It is important to note here that participants, while thankful to the Nfp organisations, insisted that it does not replace official services or the need for the government to provide a support services for families, specifically in terms of court and prison proceedings. This falls in line with the argument that the British government relies strongly on the not-for-profit sector in helping marginalised communities (Fee, 2015). However, funding from the government is not representative of the working alliance with the organisations that they promote.

While the organisation did not receive any significant criticisms during the present study, participants express that organisation needed to be more aware that while their work is highly appreciated and needed by the families, it also takes away the urgency for the government to provide support. Without the organisations, families considered that the government might be more inclined to provide families with adequate services.

4.3 Nfp Organisations as Facilitators of Emotional Support Groups by and For Families

In relation to the vulnerability of families of prisoners, an important part of the participants discussion referred to the monthly meetings organised by the organisation as a safe haven for families. Participants expressed not being able to talk to anyone in their personal environment about their difficulties due to the heavily stigmatised believes of ‘familial contamination’ and ‘they must have known’ belief, creating ‘undeserving of help and support’ feelings from society. One participant shared their feelings about this:

“It was a very isolating time as well. It’s not like you can meet up with friends and they just ask, ‘how is your son’ and you can just say ‘oh well... I’m going to drive up on

Saturday and go see him'. It's not really the sort of conversation they have. So, you keep that in. [...] People don't want to discuss it. [...] You sort of hide half of your life behind a curtain. I was very careful what I would say to nosy people."

(Ana, Mother)

Following from this, participants were quick to praise the organisation for providing a safe and welcoming space where they could discuss their feelings and problems freely without fear of judgment and blame. Group members all share an understanding of what it means to be a family member of a prisoners and to be part of a stigmatised and marginalised community and could therefore provide mutual empathy and compassion. Within the group family members felt validated in their reasons to be emotional, angry and worried. Additionally, while participants previously expressed feeling isolated and rejected from society, they highlighted the support groups as giving them a strong sense of belonging.

"I feel like this terrible thing happened to me and I met people who have enriched my life. I met people who have shown me the greatest amount of compassion and empathy. Who've not judged me, not questioned my ability as a parent. In some ways I am proud to be a family member. They understand me and I understand them. "

(Ana, mother)

Beyond this they are also able to help each other by providing crucial information and guidance. As mentioned in the previous theme, the lack of information is a major concern and problematic for families. Through the organisation, not only are families able to get the necessary information, they are also able to pass on the information to new families, creating a sense of purpose. The participants have expressed feelings of empowerment by doing something positive and helpful within a difficult and emotionally hurtful situation.

"To just be sat around a table with a bunch of other women who all have taken time out to offer each other support is quite empowering, being a family member in prison using your experienced to help others. It is nice to be like 'I've been there, here's what to do and what not to do'. Really the best way for families to work out how things work is to phone up other people in the same situation."

(Belle, sister)

Discussion around the emotional benefits of the group meetings featured prominently in the participants interviews. Not only do the meetings provide a space for the families to express their emotions freely, they are encouraged to do so by other families without feeling guilty or ashamed. This follows Codd's (2008) argument on the emotional support abilities of self-help groups for families experiencing stigma or fear of stigma. Throughout literature, self-help groups have been defined as "an expanding and potentially vital portion of the health and human service system" (Maton, 1988, p53). Without the support of official agencies, those self-help groups become one of the only reliable support systems.

Beyond the emotional 'first-aid' aspect, participants described the emotional benefits emerging from the self-help groups as a cycle of receiving and giving. Firstly, participants feel relief after being given vital information from other families, to understand the rules and regulations of the system. Drawing from the experience of others, especially in the early days, has been shown in previous research to make a significant impact on the overall emotional well-being of families in the long term (Condry, 2007). In the second stage, families are able to share this information, as well as their personal experiences, themselves with other families. In doing so, families expressed feelings of worthiness, purpose and empowerment. In particular, participants expressed that this cycle happens naturally rather than consciously which significantly increases the emotional gains from it. These findings are representative of Albert Bandura's notion of self-efficacy (1986). He considered empowerment as a process whereby "an individual's belief in his or her self-efficacy is enhanced, thus, to empower means either to strengthen this belief or to weaken one's belief in personal powerlessness" (Conger & Kanungo, 1988, p474). In this study participants discussed increased feelings of confidence and control over their own motivation and social environment through the process of receiving and giving within the support group.

4.4 Nfp Organisations as Facilitators of Re-Definition and Re-Enforcement of Self-Identity in the Adversity of a Shame and Blame Society

Participants in unison expressed feelings of shame in regard to their status as a family member of a prisoner. Goffman's (1963) concept of secrecy and 'guilt by association' was strongly represented in the interviews, as participants discussed feeling the need to lie about the whereabouts of their family member and having to "hide half your life behind a curtain" (Ana, mother). In particular, they talked about feeling overwhelmed and tired of being scared of the reactions of strangers if they would find out and being aware that even close friends or family members had the potential to have negative views. One participant described how she felt about having a relative in prison:

"By association, having a relative in prison, I've been scared of how I am going to look. I put myself into a little bubble where people are quite positive. But I'm fully aware that outside of that there are strangers who probably have the potential to be saying or thinking negative things. "

(Belle, sister)

The very limited official agencies offering services for families, don't take into account the mental health of the families and their personal struggles with their identity. In light of this situation participants discussed how, with the support of organisations and other families, they are able to re-evaluate their feelings and look at the 'family of prisoner' identity in comparison to other identities, such as LGBT or ethnic. While these hold their own stigmas, in today's society, they have become less shameful and hold less weight in the definition of one's identity as a whole. Ana (mother) shared the following about her identity as a family member after working with the organisation for a significant time:

"Now I'm quite happy to stand up. Cause it shouldn't be what defines me. My sexuality doesn't define who I am, my religion doesn't. Why should having a family member in prison define who I am?"

For participants, working with the organisation meant they could meet other family members, seeing them for more than just 'family members of a prisoner' and apply this to themselves. Furthermore, through meeting other family members, and sharing experiences, participants talked about the idea of losing oneself in 'being a family member' and being focused on that part of their lives and all it entails. As such they shared feelings that their own lives had to take a second role and that they have to prioritise their family member. Often, they talked about not being able to be themselves or talk about themselves because the family member in prison took priority. One participant expressed her feelings about this:

"My brother comes first, then my mum and much further down the list how I feel. It's nice to be with other people who are in such a situation and I don't have to worry about saying something that might upset my mum."

(Belle, sister)

Another participant added:

"In this, it's not about my son, it is about me as a family member. Sometimes I think people forget that. I went over to speak at the at the University I said, 'I won't tell you about my son, that's his story, I will speak about my story'. By separating the two, it gave me more strength. I got my own identity back."

(Ana, mother)

A positive self-identity in this context has a tremendous effect. As a direct consequence of this, participants have expressed feeling freer in taking time for themselves and the rest of their families. Without the heaviness of the shame and stigma attached to their identity, they were able to regain a sense of agency and self-worth.

A major concern for the families has been their right to care about their family member in prison without feeling wrong in doing so due to the social stigma attached to caring about a prisoner. Participants felt that they needed to justify the prisoners actions in a positive way or convince other they were not a 'bad person' as well as justify their own innocence. In particular, the mothers expressed losing their motherhood status as their child is taken away

from them and put into the care of the prison staff. During the interviews it became clear that they didn't feel that they had the right to be mothers, going as far as to say they felt the prison system would 'punish' prisoners if parents were too active in trying to help. Mothers also felt the pressure of society to be ashamed as they have supposedly 'failed' motherhood and raised a 'criminal'. Through the connectedness and solidarity within the support group, they communicated a great sense of relief by talking to other parents and being supported in their right to care and not feel guilty. These findings correspond with the views of Carrasco (2016), demonstrating the 'collective reconstruction of identity through social cohesion' as an effective approach to de-stigmatisation within a community. The strong social cohesion in the support group felt by the participants to feel empowered within the powerlessness of their situation. As Prilleltensky (2008) argues, 'obtaining, producing and enabling power' is a key factor in increasing well-being and empowering marginalised communities.

4.5 Nfp Organizations as Encouraging and Supporting Transformative Change.

In respect to the considerations about enhancing vulnerability and empowerment for families of prisoners, a noteworthy part of the discussion by participants revolved around the changes in their life on a greater aspect. Participants revealed that once they felt emotionally more stable and had a greater sense of self-identity and self-worth, they felt the need to take actions of their own towards changing the stigmatising attitudes of society around families of prisoners. In particular the concept of 'injustice' replaced the idea of stigma and shame, taking participants feelings of vulnerability and using it as a tool towards a greater cause.

"I got stronger because before I was quite confident but, now if I see something unfair or... I have to speak up because I think 'what's the worst thing that can happen?'"

(Charlie, mother)

Participants primarily attributed the change to the work of the organisation in providing key information, being encouraging and supportive in their search for answers. Having access to the organisations resources allowed families to gain valuable knowledge on how the prison and criminal justice system work and the failing of these in terms of supporting families of prisoners. A strong sense of empowerment emerges throughout the interviews as

participants became more vocal about the need for families to demand change. One participant described her journey towards becoming a professional activist in the cause for justice for families of prisoners with the help of SPF:

“I am a lot stronger about it than I was. I think clearly. The fact that I have applied to these jobs and want to come to speak about it, that’s all indicative of feeling empowered rather than ashamed. I wouldn’t have done it a year ago. Me learning as much as possible about everything to do with prison and prisoners’ families has been empowering for me. But it hasn’t been easy to get all that information. ”

(Belle, sister)

Another participant talked about the help of the organisation’s directors in helping her contact the local government and working towards transformative change in the justice system:

“I feel much more empowered. I’ve been to the Ministry of Justice. I had a meeting with them, you know, and I said what I had to say. Because I was empowered. My MP’s have been fantastic. I would never have contacted them before. The head of prison reform. I think Sam and Dennis [directors of SPF] gave me a lot of... Like Sam would find out stuff for me and get my stuff to read. Sam would do things. I would phone her. I think Sam believes in me. In this, it’s not about my son, it is about me as a family member.”

(Ana, mother)

These findings relate back to a first impact evaluation study by the present researcher on the works of the organisation SPF (Schroeder, 2019). The organisation not only offered them emotional and practical support, they are also actively involved in changing government policies and prison guidelines. Chamberlin (1997) argues that empowerment for marginalised communities, strongly emerges from hope that change is possible. By being actively encouraging and guiding interested individuals, the organisation is providing this hope and working towards social justice.

4.6 Summary

The present chapter provided a thematic analysis of the research findings as well as an in-depth discussion of each theme. A complete summary of the findings will be presented in the next chapter along with the discussion about the limitation of this research and a final conclusion of this dissertation.

Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the reader with a summary of this research's findings. In the second part the limitations of the research will be discussed, including considerations for future research. The chapter will end with a final summary.

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study set out to explore the experiences of vulnerability of families of prisoners' and how the work of not-for-profit organisations contributes to the empowerment of the community. Research findings reinforce the idea that the government provided limited support for families of prisoners (Condry & Smith, 2018). Official agencies, such as the criminal justice service and the probation services, were described as non-existent, confusing and discriminatory. As a direct result of this, Nfp organisations in the not-for-profit sector were seen as an invaluable and essential alternative for families in need of support and guidance. These services were described as critically important in accessing vital information, non-judgmental and emotionally reassuring, as well as de-stigmatizing and empowering.

In particular the monthly support groups organised by the organisation were described by the participants as a reassuring safe space where they could express their feelings without fear of judgment or blame. In line with previous research (Maton, 1988), the support group within the organisation, run by and for families of prisoners, offers families who are experiencing loneliness and isolation due to stigma, or fear of stigma, a welcoming community. Participants emphasised that with the help of the organisation and the support groups, they are able to re-construct their sense of identity in the face of powerlessness (Carrasco, 2016). Furthermore, participants used the resources provided by the organisation and, with their support, advocated for greater social change in terms of government policies and prison guidelines. Consistent with previous research, (Chamberlin, 1997) participants felt that working towards change in the marginalisation and stigmatization of families of prisoners encourages feelings of empowerment. Although the work of the organisation was highly

praised by the participants some criticisms emerged. The all-around support provided by the organisation was considered by the families as facilitating government's lack of services, as they rely on the not-for-profit sector.

These findings support Stoneberg's (2008) & Brown's (2018) claims that exploring vulnerability in a safe space and within empathic relationships are essential to building resilience and empowerment, particularly in relation to stigma and social oppression. Throughout the themes discussed, many of the findings related with previous studies on the work of Nfp organisations in providing none-judgmental and welcoming attitudes (Codd, 2002), safe spaces (Hartworth et al., 2016) and a new sense of identity and social status (Codd, 2008).

5.3 Limitation and Directions for Future Research

Within the present study, a number of limitations emerge. First, the participants recruited for this research were family members of individuals in prison or shortly released from prison, who at the time of the interviews did not experience any emotional distress, current mental health crisis, or any issues related to the imprisonment of their family member, as these were excluding criteria for participation. It is important to be mindful of those in relation to the participants of this study as well as the findings. Future research should focus on how family members of recently incarcerated individuals, who are currently going through the first stages of imprisonment, experience the stigma and shame. Additionally, research should explore the differences in shame perception and vulnerability between families of recently convicted and/or imprisoned individuals and those with relations to long term prisoners.

Secondly, in terms of limitation, it is important to acknowledge the transferability of this study's findings to other communities. The findings primarily reflect the discussion of the participants of this study, and to some extent other families of prisoners. While qualitative research does not explicitly concern itself with generalisation to populations (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010), because of empirical issues (Bryman, 2012) it does not lend itself to a possibility of transferability to other communities.

Thirdly, an important factor to consider within the limitation of this study is the underrepresentation of gender and family relation status such as spouses or children of

prisoners. While the methodology refers to the minority in male family members joining Nfp organisations, future research should focus on male family members of a prisoner and their experiences of shame, vulnerability and empowerment.

Fourthly, the sample size of the present research is representative of the methodological challenges in recruitment amongst the community. Whilst the study benefited from access to family members through SPF, the organisation in itself is a relatively small organisation in comparison to other Nfp organisations in the field around the UK. Further limitations included the time and resources available to the researcher, particularly due to the heavy restrictions following Covid 19 lockdown. Further research should look at the empowerment of members of larger organisations including a larger sample size as well as a more gender balanced sample.

Fifthly, the use of qualitative method was both a strength and a weakness in this studies approach. While face-to-face interviews allowed for an in-depth conversation between the researcher and the participants, the location has been found to actively influence the process (Elwood & Martin, 2004). Two out of three interviews were carried out, at the request of participant, in a public space. Although participants assured the researcher, they were fully prepared and comfortable to discuss the subject in public, it has influenced the choice of words participants used as to not bring attention to the interview from the public. A way to avoid this would be to determine a specific private space dedicated to the interviews.

Finally, this study focused on empowerment from a Nfp organisation, potentially eliminating discussions around di-empowerment and vulnerability directly consequential from the organization. Although certain negative aspects of the organisation have been mentioned in the findings, future research should focus on the problematics and concerns around the not-for-profit sector in working with marginalised communities.

5.4 Conclusion

The present study hoped to contribute to the body of knowledge on the vulnerability and empowerment of families of prisoners by exploring the work of a Nfp organisation in the not-for-profit sector. While the findings in the present qualitative study cannot be generalised to other marginalised communities or to international justice systems, it aims to provide essential knowledge towards providing necessary help to the community.

As suggested by previous studies (Codd, 2002; Maton, 1988) the not-for-profit sector is invaluable in providing targeted and specialised support for stigmatised and marginalised communities, in particular in the absence of adequate government services. These organisations are described by participants as life-changing and empowering. This study aligns itself with Codd's (2008) argument on the growing need for UK based research and a more detailed understanding of the experiences of families of prisoners in its entirety. Indeed, family's experiences cannot be reduced to stages of vulnerability and empowerment, but rather described as life-changing experiences opening powerful possibilities. As described by Charlie, a study participant:

"We are an army. An army of silent people who can make a lot of positive change."

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Participants Information sheet

“Empowering Families of Prisoners”

Dear Participant,

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether to agree it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. I can go through the information sheet with you and answer any questions you have. Talk to others about the study if you wish and ask if there is anything that is not clear. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. You may take this sheet away with you if you wish. Thank you for reading this.

Introduction and what are the purposes of the study/project?

Hi, my name is Mick Schroeder. I am a MA Community Psychology student at the University of Brighton. This research is interested in the experiences and feelings of shame, vulnerability and empowerment of families of prisoners. I have previously done research with Sussex Prisoners’ Families; however, the study has not been commissioned by the organization and is entirely independent.

It is designed to explore what you think about the ideas of empowerment and vulnerability amongst prisoners’ families, as these terms are often used to describe people at moments of difficulty in their lives.

I will be conduct interviews under the supervision of an assigned university lecturer. I will carry out, transcribe and analyse the interviews, as well as produce the final piece of work.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been invited to participate in the interview as you have been a service-user of SPF for at least six months and have experience with their services. We are unable to interview any person under the age of 18 or in a current mental health crisis. This specifically refers to individuals with recent hospital visits or new medications related to mental health, as well as high-risk mental health disorders such as schizophrenia, dissociative identity disorder or severe Post-traumatic stress disorder. If you are unable to participate for these reasons, there is no need to do anything else—thank you for your attention so far.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. Your decision to take part or not take part in the study or withdraw at any time has no consequences or effect on your place and support from Sussex Prisoners Families organisation.

Please be aware that if you decide to take part, your withdrawal is only possible before, during or up to 14 days after the interview. The interviews will be anonymously transcribed, and your identity removed, it will therefore no longer be possible to remove your data after the transcription.

If you decide not to take part, no further information, or explanations are necessary. A decision to withdrawal or not to take part will in no form have any consequences on you or your relationship with SPF.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you decide to take part in the study, you will be given a physical copy of this information sheet and two consent forms to sign before the interview, one of which will be given for you to keep.

Once you have decided to participate you will be invited to take part in an approximately one-hour long one-to-one interview with the researcher. This interview can take place at a public space such as a library room, or at the SPF offices in Brighton, depending on your preferences. Additionally, the interviews can be scheduled to fit according to your availability. You will be asked to provide your age, gender and relation to your family member in Prison. The interview will be in a semi-structured informal and confidential setting, allowing you to openly talk about your experience and answer a number of questions. The interview will be audio-recorded for future transcription purposes. The interview transcriptions will then be analysed by the researcher according to qualitative Psychology research methods.

Will I be paid for taking part?

If you decide to take part in the research and would like for the interview to take place at the SPF office in Brighton, your travel expenses will be covered by the organisation. There will also be tea or coffee, as well as snacks during the interview at the office.

What are the potential disadvantages or risks of taking part?

Although care has been taken to protect you from any harm, the interview could potentially cause some emotional distress or discomfort because of the nature of the study and the questions. In the case where this would happen, and the interview would be too distressing, the interview will be stopped immediately, and you will be given the option to withdrawal from the study. You can also at any time refuse to answer any questions you feel uncomfortable with. Additionally, a staff member of SPF will remain on the premises to offer any support needed.

What are the potential benefits of taking part?

Although there are no direct positive benefits to the participants, participation will have positive benefits for the organization and by extension, for them. The study will add to the existing literature on community empowerment, vulnerability and the understanding of families of prisoners. This will be beneficial for a Nfp organization to develop their services further. Additionally, the present research is the student dissertation and therefore will add educational value to the student, develop skills and provide a solid framework and knowledge for future community work.

Will my taking part in the study/project be kept confidential?

Your participation in the study will be kept entirely confidential, and the interview will be anonymized during the transcription process. This will involve the complete removal of your name or any names and names mentioned during the interview. All names will be changed into randomly generated names, and there will be no record of the original names. The audio recordings will be destroyed completely after the transcription. The anonymized transcripts will be stored on the university's secure server. Although maximum care will be taken to remove any identifiable details, some information you provide during the interview could cause certain individuals close to you or aware of your case to recognize you. If you think this may be the case, I will change or exclude any identifying features. The data collected will be stored for a period of one year, or until the student's degree has been awarded, after which it will be destroyed.

<https://www.brighton.ac.uk/about-us/statistics-and-legal/privacy/index.aspx>

What will happen to the results of the project?

The results of this study will be presented as part of a dissertation be marked as part of the students Postgrad degree.

If you would like a digital or paper copy of the final piece of work, , please e-mail me and I will be happy to provide you with one.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The study is organised and funded by the university of Brighton with the approval of Sussex Prisoners Families. The study will be conducted by me and I will report to a university supervisor.

What if I have a question or concern?

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to talk to the researcher, a staff member of Sussex Prisoners Families of contact one of the university supervisors.

Contact details

Researcher:

Mick Schroeder

M.Schroeder1@uni.brighton.ac.uk

University supervisor and contacts:

Nichola Khan

N.Khan@brighton.ac.uk

Carl Walker

C.J.Walker@brighton.ac.uk

Sussex Prisoners Families:

Denis Byrne

Denis@sussexprisonersfamilies.org.uk

Who has reviewed the study?

The study had been reviewed and approved by the University of Brighton Social Sciences College Research Ethics Committee CREC Ethical Committee to ensure the safety and well-being of both the participants and the researcher.

Appendix 2: Consent Form

“Empowering Families of Prisoners”

Name of Researcher: Mick SCHROEDER

Please
initial
box

I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions.

The researcher has explained to my satisfaction the purpose, principles and procedures of the study and any possible risks involved.

I am aware that I will take part in an interview with the researcher.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study up to 14 days after the interview without giving a reason and without incurring consequences from doing so.

I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and the university supervisor.

I am aware that the interview will be audio recorded for further analysis and understand that the recording will be anonymously transcript.

I agree to take part in the above study.

.....
Name of Participant, Date, Signature

.....
Name of Researcher, Date, Signature

Appendix 3: Interview Guide

Could you give me a brief introduction about yourself and your situation?

How did you feel about the situation at the beginning (before SPF?)

Has there been any major impacts on your social life arising from having a family member in prison?

Do you feel that families of prisoners have been considered a stigmatized community?

What do you think societies view of families of prisoners is?

What do you feel about this type of categorisation?

What would be a more accurate representation?

Do you feel that stigmatised views of prisoners' families fit or do not fit your experience?

Are there areas you feel less empowered than others in relation to the experience in your everyday life of having a family member in prison?

What support do you have in relation to your situation?

How have you felt supported?

What would benefit you more in terms of feeling supported through this experience?

Have you experienced any feelings of empowerment as a member of Sussex Prisoners' Families?

In what ways have you experienced shame and what does it mean for you?

What has the experience with SPF meant for you and your family?

Has it changed your negative or positive feelings about having a relative in prison in any way?

Have there been any major changes since you've been working with SPF in terms of yourself?

- In relation to your beliefs about families of prisoners?
- In relation to your understanding of worthiness, courage, compassion
- Shame, resilience, stigma

Appendix 4: Thematic Coding Process

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

Vulnerability

Family blaming & media dangers

- Strong sense of blame from society
- Parents as responsible for children's behaviours
- 'Bad' by association
- Equally guilty
- Families as corrupted
- Families bringing drugs into prison
- False publications in the news
- Using families and prisoners for click baiting
- Endangering families by publishing photos, names, addresses
- Punishing the families not the prisoners because they don't get the news.
- Arbitrary hatred

Fear of judgment and rejection

- Status of 'family of prisoner'
- 'life behind a curtain'
- Mistrusting strangers
- Desire to run away
- Putting a positive spin on reality
- Defending oneself and family member

Loss of identity

- Lack of control, care and possibility to help
- Government takes away their roles as mothers
- Everything turns around prisoner, families become unimportant

Government & Criminal justice discrimination

- Shaming families during visits
- Mocking prisoners for parental care
- Ignoring families request
- Moving prisoners without considering families situation
- Divide between families and officials
- Support for families not automatic and recognized
- Lack of information

Emotional consequences

- Comparable to grief
- Worse than grief as with death you know what to do
- Devastation, shock
- Overwhelming, all consuming
- Sensations of drowning, no idea where to turn to or help available
- Feelings of isolation, being alone and lost
- Emotionally and physically exhausted
- Depression, anxiety, helplessness

Empowerment

Identity: As a family member & as an individual in their own right

- A space to express own emotions and feelings in the situation
- Organisation cares supports families emotionally outside of their relationship with a prisoner
- A space to put oneself first in
- 'you've done nothing wrong'
- Rejecting the 'family of prisoner' identity, it doesn't matter, what matters is the person
- Option to change name, story if wanted
- Taking back status as parents and family member
- Provide family entertainment for the family unit on the 'outside'

Emotional support

- Sense of belonging in the group, particularly after being rejected from society.
- Deserving of support and help
- Support group offers un-conditional support, help and advice
- Reassurance
- Empowerment through helping others
- Freedom to speak without fear of judgment or rejection

Right to be vulnerable & Worthiness

- Organisation recognises the vulnerability of families
- Families shown they are worthy of support and charity
- Encouragement

Practical support

- Organisation hold more weight with government and prisons
- Organisation able to contact prison & government agencies on family's behalf
- Providing information & directing families to the right places
- Helping prisoners enables families to be less stressed

Fighting stigma & making a change

- Using knowledge gained through the organisation to share with others
- Gaining strength through knowledge
- Understanding the system
- Encouragement to go further and initiate a conversation for change
- Families seen as a 'strong army'
- Fighting stigma of bad parent
- Applying to jobs related to imprisonment

Phase 3: Searching for themes

Theme 1:

- Acknowledgment of vulnerability

Theme 2: Support Group *by and for families*

- *Main ideas:*
- Belonging
- Worthiness
- Information exchange
- Emotional presence

Theme 3: Identity Re-formation

- Main ideas:
- Stigmatisation: Shame & Blame
- Motherhood
- 'Family of prisoner'
- Family on the outside

Theme 4: *Transformative change*

- *Main ideas*
- Professional & Personal purpose
- Mediation with official agencies

Phase 4 – Reviewing Themes / Generating a thematic map

