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Impact of Parental Incarceration in Iceland

Conditions and Support for Children with Incarcerated
Parents



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Abstract

Children of prisoners have increasingly been touted as the silent victims of incarceration due to the emotional and mental distress that often occurs following a parent's incarceration. Unfortunately, these children have not been met with much academic interest in Iceland. This thesis thus seeks to provide insight into how parental incarceration affects children in Iceland. Here, the characteristics of parental incarceration in Icelandic will be demonstrated, as well as how stigmatisation is managed and what changes and additions would improve the support and facilities offered to children with incarcerated parents. Nine interviews were conducted with parents whose children have experienced parental incarceration. Of these, eight interviews were conducted with imprisoned parents and an additional interview was conducted with a family member with children affected by parental incarceration. Drawing upon the theoretical framework of critical criminology, stigmatisation, and the concept of the value of children, this thesis concludes that the Icelandic government has not fulfilled its role adequately in supporting children with incarcerated parents to decrease the adverse effects of parental incarceration. The topic of parental incarceration and its impact on children seems to be increasing in academic popularity. Numerous papers suggest that incarceration policies should specifically address the effects on children. The findings of this study reaffirm those assertions.

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Popular Science Summary

In this thesis, I interviewed nine individuals who all had in common that they are parents of children who experience parental incarceration. Parental incarceration has gathered more and more attention recently as academics have highlighted how important it is to support these children due to these difficult circumstances. This study was based on a report I wrote for the Ombudsman of Children in Iceland, as most of the data collected for the report was used to write this thesis. However, they differ significantly as this thesis is grounded in the theoretical framework of critical criminology, the theory of stigmatisation, and the concept of the worth of children. These theories were used to demonstrate the characteristics of parental incarceration in Iceland, how stigma is experienced and managed and how the experiences of these parents might prove helpful in improving the conditions and support given to children who have parents in prison.

Looking at the conditions and support from the Nordic countries regarding parental incarceration, it is evident that Iceland is behind on the issue. Although the media has recently written about the issue, studies have yet to be written about parental incarceration in Iceland and how it affects children. Thus, this essay aims to demonstrate these conditions and support, gaining a deeper understanding of what is being done and how to improve the situation effectively.

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1. Introduction

In the summer of 2022, I was handed the opportunity to work as intern on a project alongside the Icelandic Ombudsman of Children. This project sought to highlight the conditions, amenities, and social assistance afforded to children who have incarcerated parents. In the larger context as well as in Iceland, children of prisoners have been woefully neglected by their respective governments. The purpose of this work was thus to examine parental incarceration and how it affects children, and subsequently present findings to the government, the prisons- and parole office, and Icelandic society to highlight and improve the situation at hand. This master's thesis is a continuation of this work.

“My wife and I decided that while I was in prison, the children would not come visit.”

Similar to schools, churches, and hospitals, prisons have a specific purpose, ideology, and role in our society (Drake & Scott, 2021). Prisons are not only subject to their physical structure but are also social structures with social functions (Drake & Scott, 2021). As societies have evolved, prisons have as well, and as with any other institution playing a societal role, its purpose changes with time as society does. In the Nordic countries, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, and Finland, their respective prison systems have focused on rehabilitating those who have committed crimes worthy of imprisonment. Prisons have the role of carrying out punishment that authorities have sentenced; however, the unintended consequences of imprisonment result in more people enduring punitive measures than was intended. In academia, as well as in the media, children with incarcerated parents have been called the silent or invisible victims of incarceration due to parental imprisonment's common adverse effects on them. Recently, discussions surrounding detention, prison conditions, and their effects have become more prevalent (Kjartansdóttir, 2017, Logadóttir, 2022). As the media has increasingly focused on the impact of imprisonment on those incarcerated and their children, public interest in the matter has also increased. As the topic of parental incarceration pertaining to children with incarcerated parents has not been researched to a significant extent in Iceland, this essay will focus on the following research questions:

1.1 Aim and research questions

Although parental incarceration has been researched by scholars for decades now, increased focus has recently been put on parental incarceration regarding how it affects children. At the same time, Icelandic authorities and academic society have not paid attention to children's needs regarding parental incarceration until recently. Due to its small population and highly hegemonic society, parental incarceration must be examined within that context. Parental incarceration in populous Western societies might pose different issues than those in Iceland. The purpose of this essay is thus to demonstrate the characteristics of parental incarceration in Iceland and how parental incarceration affects children within a small country such as Iceland. Based on that purpose, this thesis will focus on the following research questions:

- What characterises parental incarceration in Iceland?
- How do individuals who experience parental incarceration manage stigmatisation?
- What perspectives and suggestions can parents of incarcerated children provide to improve the experience of parental incarceration?

Nordic prisons have been touted as being the best in the world, with Pratt (2007) supposedly coining the term, *Scandinavian (nordic) exceptionalism*. The essential case to note here is that *exceptionalism* is a subjective concept that compares the penal system to the relatively poor conditions of especially Anglo-American countries (Dullum & Ugelvik, 2012). With that in mind, examining where prison systems fall short is essential. In this case, reviewing the assistance, facilities and amenities provided to the children of those who have been incarcerated. In examining a prison system, inspecting which aspects could minimise recidivism is essential. Parent-child relationships while the parent is in prison have been studied numerous times. Academics have concluded that having a better relationship with their child incentivises the prisoner to adhere to legal norms (Lockwood et al., 2022). It is clear then that for the prisoner, a good relationship with their children is linked with more positive behaviour after incarceration. This leaves the question to be answered, what about the children? It is also essential to examine how their life is affected while their parent or parents are incarcerated, as the incarceration of a parent is a highly traumatising and challenging event for the child to experience (Kremer et al., 2021).

In academia, children have often been called the silent victims of incarceration. In this essay, the Icelandic prison system and how it accommodates the children of its inmates is examined. What policies, amenities, and support are facilitated to accommodate this highly unusual setting for the children, how it affects these children and what aspects influence these policies.

In the Nordic countries, excluding Iceland, prison and parole offices have implemented a systematic approach to address the needs of children who have incarcerated parents. Children have the right to be informed of their parent's incarceration in a child-friendly way, best seen in the amenities granted to the children. Readily available access to information about the prison designed in a child-friendly way, government-sponsored interest groups that focus on the needs of children, and associations focusing on bringing together families who have an incarcerated individual, are all programs that have the sole purpose of improving the lives of children who have incarcerated parents. *For Fangers Parörende (FFP)*, *Bufff*, *SAVN*, and *KRITS*, are associations in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland that focus on the issue of children whose parents are in prison. In Iceland, no such associations exist. In Iceland, there appears to be a complete lack of any association or organisation dedicated to the needs of children who have incarcerated parents. Furthermore, there is a lack of a systematic approach or framework focused on addressing the complex needs of these children.

The Icelandic PPO's website has a subsection dedicated to incarcerated individuals' family members and relatives. The website contains information regarding children's prison visits, but they are not designed in a child-friendly way. One could argue that they are not designed with children in mind as they are simply a list of rules and conditions that the prisoner must meet to be allowed to meet their child, as well as an information sheet outlining the proper papers the parent or guardian of the child has to fill out before the visit (Fangelsismálastofnun.is/heimsoknir). In an inquiry submitted to the Icelandic PPO, they were asked about plans to update their information to accommodate children better. A response from the PPO suggested that an overhaul was planned. Later, however, the director of the Icelandic PPO contradicted that statement, stating that insufficient financial resources prevent any such measures.

Compared to the Nordics, a stark difference is seen as their respective PPOs, government agencies, organisations and associations linked with children who have incarcerated parents all have a detailed account geared towards children in a child-friendly way. Taking the case of the Swedish, *Kriminalvarden*, they have a website called *Insidan*, dedicated towards "...a

child or young person with a family member in prison, custody or parole”

(insidan.kriminalvarden.se). Not only is there practical and child-friendly information on the site regarding how the child can contact their parent in prison, what visiting is like as well as information about what the child’s parent is doing in prison, but there is also interactive content on the site, providing detail through short films about what the child’s parent is doing. The child sets different times on a clock seen on the site, and a short film shows the child can see the conditions and what the prisoners are doing. Providing information for children about their parent’s incarceration can prove to be vital as they are prone to feeling upset and stressed about the unknown conditions their parent is currently in.

To summarise, Icelandic prisons provide little to no information for children regarding what the prison is like for their parents, what happens inside the prison, what the child must do when visiting the prison, or ways for the child to contact their parents. Furthermore, no associations, NGOs or government-sponsored organisations are focused on improving the lives of children with parents in prison. Many accounts from children describing their involvement in organisations for children of prisoners state that it helped reduce feelings of ostracisation or stigma (McGinley & Jones, 2018). Lack of information regarding children was brought up frequently in the questionnaires sent to the prisons and Vernd halfway home. In the questionnaire, incarcerated parents expressed concern with the lack of information given to their children. Asked what aspects they would most like to improve regarding their children's visits, one interlocutor states, *“I would like to see them explain better how things work here”*. Children are often curious and puzzled about their parent’s incarceration. A significant disruption of their family format justifies the child’s concerns thoroughly and understandably, as research has shown that improving information for children as well as providing that information in a child-friendly manner, can calm the child’s worries regarding their incarcerated parent (Kremer et al., 2021).

1.2 Delimitations

This research focuses on the lived experiences of children of incarcerated parents, however, from the account of their parents. These parents, be they incarcerated or not, all have experience dealing with children’s visitations and the support given to those children. The decision not to interview children was built on time restraints and significant ethical concerns regarding interviewing children about sensitive topics. More specifically: interviewing

children can be distressing for them, and they are unable to consent (Saunders, McArthur & Moore, 2015). This will be discussed further in the ethics chapter.

1.3 Outline

In chapter two, the thesis will outline the previous research on how parental incarceration affects children. The research outlined in this chapter is essential in explaining the relevance of this thesis and supporting the research findings. Chapter three will outline the theories and concepts used to support the conclusions. Chapter four will present the methodological approaches used in gathering and examining the collected data as well as to reflect on the ethical concerns and positionality of the researcher. The fifth chapter will provide an analysis of the collected data and its findings. These findings will be presented through answering the research questions at hand. Following this, the final chapter will conclude the results of the study.

2. Previous research

This chapter will outline previous research on the topic of parental incarceration. The subject of good child-imprisoned parent relationships as a matter of positive recidivism outcomes has been well documented in academia. Lowering recidivism is one of many factors that can provide insight into whether the penal system is working as a tool for restorative justice. Continuous and plentiful research is to be found on the topic. Family contact has often been touted as one of if not the most significant factors in maintaining family ties and subsequently decreasing the likelihood of recidivism (Lockwood et al, 2019). Some research has shown that when prisoners are asked about what bonds motivate them to avoid reoffending, they are children and family (Redondo, Padrón-Goya & Martín, 2022). How parental incarceration affects children is slowly gaining traction. In the following sections, I will first demonstrate the current and relevant research on parental incarceration by focusing on how it affects children and, secondly, how contemporary research on the pains of imprisonment are extended towards fatherhood and children.

2.1 Parental Incarceration and its Effects on Children

Where there has been a significant historical dearth in the literature is research on the incarcerated parent-child relationship, where the focus is on how the incarceration affects the child. This is, however, improving. Contemporary research focusing on children with incarcerated parents has deduced that a good relationship between the child and the incarcerated parent positively affects the parent and their children's mental health (Kremer et al. 2021). Hutton (2016) explains how although it is evident that prisoners benefit from stronger family ties, emphasis must be put on the children's right to access their parents. In Iceland, there is a lack of research on these children. As mentioned in other research (Besemer et al., 2019), in academia and in public discourse, children with parents in prison are the hidden victims of incarceration.

Kremer et al. (2021) conclude that children who have a good relationship with their incarcerated parents have a significantly reduced chance of mental health issues and feelings of loneliness and increased overall happiness. These findings are found in other research, such as in Song et al. (2018). Additionally, according to Miller (2006), the parent-child relationship quality is paramount for the child to adjust to parental incarceration. Furthermore, Miller posits that the status of the relationship before imprisonment is an essential factor. If the connection is positive, encouraging the positive relationship between the parent and child is considered even more essential as it is likely to benefit the child, especially in the latter stages of childhood and early adulthood (Miller, 2006).

Phillips and Zhao (2010) demonstrate that after a parent is imprisoned, children display feelings of sadness, grief, shame, and stigma from their community. Dawson, Jacks and Nyamathi (2012) have also found that because of feelings of guilt and stigma, these children find themselves having to lie and hide their family's situation. Children with incarcerated parents not disclosing their family affairs have sometimes been proven to prevent teasing and feelings of rejection from their peers. However, selective disclosure can lead to positive thoughts and supportive relationships with other children in similar circumstances (Neshmith & Ruhland, 2008). Dawson, Jackson and Nyamathi (2012) also deduce that a good relationship between a teenager and their incarcerated parent can improve their overall mental health, emotional development and educational endeavours, and juxtaposing, research has also shown that the trauma following having a parent put in prison increases the likelihood of the child displaying deviant behaviour such as self-harm, drug use and anti-social behaviour (Besemer

et al. 2019). Lockwood et al.'s. (2022) research on children's prison visits provides insight into the importance of child-centred rooms. Lockwood et al. highlight the importance of the visiting area being suitable for children with sensory sensitivities, ADHD, autism, and PTSD (Lockwood et al. 2022). Parents' visitation has not always proved to be a solution to behavioural issues and recidivism, as Benning and Lahm (2016) display how imprisoned mothers are more likely to commit offences inside the prison after their children visit. Ystanes and Ugelvik (2020) claim that mothers generally have a more difficult time being far away from their children, highlighting the gendered aspects of parental incarceration.

Practical barriers are also an issue of concern for the children of prisoners. Distance from loved ones is considered one of the critical factors in determining whether and how often prisoners receive visits (Miller, 2006; Clark & Duwe, 2017). Therefore, it can be one of the significant determinants of the child's and the parent's well-being. Rubenstein, Toman & Cochran (2021) also state that a child-friendly environment determines greatly whether children are likely to want to visit their parents in prison. Toys, games, and friendly environments can all determine a child's will to spend time in a family visiting room in prison (Rubenstein, Toman & Cochran, 2021).

Following this, it is essential to note that the context of Icelandic society might have differing effects on the results. As its population is much smaller than most Western countries, issues regarding stigmatisation and anonymity might have distinctive features, as the smaller-scale nature of Icelandic society poses different challenges to children who experience parental incarceration.

2.2 The Pains of Imprisonment

Graham Sykes's work outlining the additional pains of imprisonment has been relevant to the critical examination of prisons since its original publication in 1958. In a chapter of his book, *Society of Captives*, Sykes highlights the unintended plights prisoners face in their day-to-day lives. Sykes originally outlined five differentiating pains of imprisonment being the loss of liberty, the loss of autonomy, the loss of security, the loss of goods and services, and the loss of heterosexual relationships. As mentioned above, these deprivations negatively impact prisoners' mental and sometimes physical well-being (Sykes, 1958). Ever since the publication of Sykes's work on the pains of imprisonment, criminologists and other social scientists have hypothesised and researched what additional pains prisoners experience and

how its experience is affected by intersectional matters, such as gender, race, and age, to name a few, as Sykes has been criticised for his highly gendered, male view of prisoners (Haggerty & Bucerius). Although prisons are typically very gendered, as male prisoners make up the majority of incarcerated individuals in most societies, Sykes's dismissal of female prisoners has led researchers to formulate how these pains are experienced differently for female prisoners (Haggerty & Bucerius). For instance, many mothers have a much different experience and reaction toward their children's visit, with researchers suggesting that after visits, they are more likely to experience feelings of loss (Foster, 2012). This gendered view of formulating the gendered pains of imprisonment has led researchers to examine further parental incarceration and how it affects both the prisoner and the child of the prisoner (Haggerty & Bucerius). Ugelvik (2014) subsequently presented his findings from prisoners in Norway, where fathers are typically expected to be very involved in their children's lives. Ugelvik suggested that imprisonment challenged their ability to follow their parenting expectations, utterly disrupting how to fulfil their societal roles as fathers (Ugelvik, 2014). Building on that, the pains of imprisonment certainly apply to all those affected by an individual's incarceration, distinctively their family.

3. Theories

The theoretical framework underpinning the results of this chapter is anchored upon three essential tenets. Firstly, the expansive and comprehensive theoretical foundation of critical criminology will be used to explain the fundamental nature of power, dominion, and critical evaluation of the established norms in the context of changing prison policy. Secondly, the theoretical framework of Erving Goffman's writings on stigma will be introduced to explain the societal obstacles that children who experience parental incarceration might experience, due to their affiliation with a parent who has a stigmatised trait, in this case being, imprisonment. Goffman's perspective provides insight into how the characteristics of the stigma associated with incarcerated individuals are noted as a "blemish of character", making the concept of courtesy stigma significant to this study and will be explored further. Substantive literature has extensively documented the increased likelihood of children experiencing mental and social difficulties following parental incarceration. The role of stigma plays a critical role in the well-being of children. Further work regarding stigmatisation in the context of parental incarceration will thus be explored.

In the collection of data, a recurrent theme emerged revolving around the crucial necessity of additional financial resources to improve and enhance the provisions and facilities available to children who experience parental incarceration. In alignment with this theme, Viviana Zelizer's conceptualisation surrounding the value attributed to children will be used to underpin the theoretical context.

3.1 Critical Criminology

The extensive theoretical framework of critical criminology is to refuse the allocated assumptions regarding crime, punishment, and imprisonment that establish current correctional practices (Welch, 1996).

Critical criminology acknowledges the importance of highlighting the voices of the marginalised as they are impacted by the present-day system of how society views obedience and crime. It subsequently penalises those who have refused to adhere to those standards (Welch, 1996). In influencing criminal justice policy, applying, and adhering to the critical element of criminology is thus profoundly important, as it pushes those with power and interest in the field of criminal justice to reflect on the current systematic approach to penalisation and how and if to improve it (Welch, 1996).

Like many other social sciences grounded in a critique of power relations, critical criminology originates in Karl Marx's thoughts on social relations (Welch, 1996). Although Marx wrote little about crime himself, classical Marxist scholars, such as Bonger (1916), Chamblis (1975), and Greenberg (1981), have all theorised the economic factors of the criminal justice system within the framework of Marxist thought. Although these classic works will not be expanded upon, they demonstrate a constant interest in theorising and critiquing contemporary criminal justice.

Critical criminologists are not necessarily of the prison abolitionist kind but rather suggest a constant critique of the prison system. For example, Friedrichs (2018) states that prison should be for violent criminals, individuals threatening the immediate safety of others. Although this does not directly concur with the abolitionist framework, it emphasises the need to address the incarceration of non-violent individuals. The primary reason for constant critique and readjustment of the criminal justice system in relevance to this study is that those incarcerated because of their crimes are not the only ones who reap the punishment of the offence. The need for the critical criminology framework is, in this case, to demonstrate the

plight that the current system has on those who have not committed any crime but, instead, are punished because of their relations to the incarcerated individual. Punishment with regard to the offender is not only seen in the formal sense, that is to say, the enforcement of official discipline, but also in informal ways, relating to the harmful effects of parental incarceration.

Relations between those in power and those who have to adhere to that power are one of the main points of critical criminology (Punch, 2002). Punch declares that children are positioned within an adult-centric domain which is subsequently controlled and regulated by authority adults. This framing by Punch looks at children as a marginalised group, thus making them more inclined to fall victim to negligence and exploitation. This concept therefore outlines the issue of dominion and the importance of reflection towards the adult-centric system (Punch, 2002; Saunders, McArthur & Moore, 2015).

Building on that, Wallis & Dennison (2015) state that children can often be positioned in a way so they are “vulnerable to the powerful”. In Wallis & Dennison’s (2015) work, framing *republican criminology* as a possible, partial solution to the issue of non-dominion of those affected by incarceration, they criticise the current Western penal system for the unintended affects it has not only for the prisoners but also for the individuals closest to the incarcerated. Wallis and Dennison suggest that dominion for all those affected should be at the forefront rather than focusing on penalties to gain justice for their society (Wallis & Dennison, 2015). Looking at the issue of incarceration in Western countries while ignoring the assumptions we have made about the current penal system and how it should be provides people with a critical lens of the problem that is parental incarceration. Critical criminology thus implores us to forget our assumptions and realise that incarceration is not only affecting the incarcerated, but many other aspects of society.

3.2 Stigma

Stigma can be described as the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance (Goffman, 1963). Erving Goffman's work on *Stigma* proposes that specific individuals' characteristics that deviate from those of the norm become stigmatised and thus carry with it negative social consequences. Goffman’s theory suggests three kinds of stigma: Physical, Moral, and Tribal.

According to Goffman, physical stigma implies that the individual carries certain specific characteristics that are immediately visible from the norm. For example, disabilities or

deformities. Moral stigma is carried through the individual's actions, deviations from moral codes, and social norms. These are, for example, criminal behaviour. Tribal stigma explains that stigma is formed through association with a group that deviates from “common”.

Obvious cases here are being of a different ethnicity, social class, or nationality. Although stigmatised individuals might experience their stigma differently, Goffman suggests that those who share being stigmatised carry a “spoiled identity”, and the spoiled identity subsequently becomes their defining feature (Goffman, 1963)

The stigmatisation of an otherwise “normal” person because of their relation with a stigmatised person is called “courtesy stigma” (Goffman, 1963). Children who have incarcerated parents are in danger of being stigmatised because of their parents' moral stigma, and in junction with that stigma, they themselves experience tribal stigma. The reasons are their parents' deviation from moral codes and social norms, as well as being associated with their parents' “group”. Although the children's actions have not demonstrated any reason for being morally stigmatised, the association with their morally stigmatised parent suggests that the experienced stigma is of the tribal kind.

Experiencing stigmatisation in highly homogenous societies such as Iceland, experiencing and subsequently managing stigma in a highly homogeneous country such as Iceland, can be even more difficult. As noted by Ugelvik, nordic societies have had few “visible others” (Ugelvik & Dullum; 121). In a community that arguably possesses more equality than most other countries, and expresses its identity around being equal, the pressure of conforming to the set norms and not deviate from the “likhet” (the Norwegian word for similarity used as a concept explaining the way in which Norwegians experience great pressure to conform to the Norwegian identity and morals), as Ugelvik mentions, magnifies the amounting burden of being part of the visible others.

Following this, and as mentioned in the literature review, children who have incarcerated parents, are in danger of experiencing stigma and manage that stigma in multiple ways. Children's methods of managing courtesy stigma caused by their incarcerated parents range from lying about their family affairs to displaying anti-social behaviours such as self-harm, isolation, drug use (Besemer, et al. 2019), and school phobia. Furthermore, disclosing their parent's incarceration can put them at risk of being teased or rejected by peers (Branfman,

2015). When an incarceration occurs, taking to account the plights of which is handed to the child is paramount. Navigating a parent's incarceration and managing the stigmatisation that might subsequently arise is a multifaceted issue for children and an arduous one to rationalise in action. A child might be inclined to disclose their family affairs in an effort to seek support from their peers. This might prove to be a logical step in fixing feelings of isolation and loneliness (Arditti, 2016). Juxtaposing that, a child might be inclined not to disclose their family affairs in an effort to reduce the chances of stigmatisation (Arditti, 2016). Subsequently, non-disclosure might lead to children not feel as though they are able to discuss their feelings with other peers, possibly leading children to display negative external- and internal behaviours, for example getting into physical altercations with peers, or isolating themselves from other peers (Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010).

Individuals manage their stigmatised identity in different ways. Managing stigma is dependant on the concealability of the stigmatised trait. Invisible stigmas mean that a stigmatised attribute is not immediately visible by other people. This could, for example be a stigmatised sexual orientation or gender identity, disease or as in the case of the people interviewed for this paper, being imprisoned or being closely related to an incarcerated individual. As mentioned there are multiple ways of managing stigmatised identities. People might choose to use *disclosure* as a method of stigma management. Disclosing a stigmatised identity means that an individual chooses to share their stigmatised identity with others. This is often done in an effort to take back the power of the stigmatised trait so as to normalise its condition and gain acceptance from others (Birembaum, 1970). Another stigma managing tactic is *passing*. This entails the opposite of disclosure, hiding the stigmatised trait from others (Goffman, 1963). In his book, Goffman defines passing as "the management of undisclosed discrediting information". There are multiple reasons why people might choose to manage their stigma by passing. Stigmatised traits might induce prejudice from others. Kimberlyn Leary denotes passing as a "*cultural performance whereby one member of a defined social group masquerades as another in order to enjoy the privileges afforded to the dominant group*" (Leary, 1999: 1). Although it would be difficult to explain the existence of a specific social group called "Relatives of prisoners", Leary denotes how passing involves deceit in an effort to curtail the community from knowing of their stigmatised identity. The most obvious example of passing is a homosexual person who feels the need to change their appearance or characteristics to pass as straight, in an effort to reduce the likelihood of prejudicial actions

from others. Relevant to this paper, a child might choose non-disclosure in an effort to decrease the likelihood of bullying. A partner of an incarcerated individual might use passing as a method to prevent courtesy stigma directed towards their child.

Birenbaum (1970) states that those who bear courtesy stigma are “normal, but different”. In this, Birenbaum explains that a person bearing courtesy stigma is normal in that their performance of social roles is not different from others. Where the divide between the “normal” and the stigmatised is presented is during encounters between the “normal” and the person bearing courtesy stigma, where the conversation pertains to the topics of the sensitive subject (Birenbaum, 1970). Relevant to this study, this would, for example be an encounter where a “normal” asks a stigmatised child about what happened to its parent. Adhering to this social process, individuals bearing courtesy stigma manage it by not attempting to convey a normal-appearing image. Contrastingly, others attempt to erase their spoiled identity or its image to lose their affiliation with “the other” (Birenbaum, 1970).

3.3 The Worth of Children

Viviana Zelizer’s concept of the worth of children posits that children’s economic and emotional worth is not a singular fact but instead constructed through sociality (Zelizer...). In her book, *Pricing the Priceless Child*, Viviana Zelizer explores the worth of children. There she demonstrates how children’s value shifts throughout time and displays that children’s value is much rather a social construct, rather than a fixed fact. She explains this by describing how in pre-industrial societies, children did not have the emotional or cultural value as they do today, but rather an economic one. (Zelizer, 1985). After the socioeconomic and cultural shift towards the worth of children occurred, children became what Zelizer calls *Sacrilegious*, claiming that children had become emotionally priceless (Zelizer, 1985). In today's Western societies, children are seen as innocent, vulnerable beings who are integral to society's human capital investment (Bandelj & Spiegel, 2022). The value and subsequently expectations placed upon children can vary greatly depending on multiple factors. Firstly, economic conditions might determine whether children are seen as a liability and burden or a valuable future investment (Zelizer, 1985). That is to say, in times of economic hardship, children can be seen as a burden to the family structure, as they contribute to the economic decline of the parents, as well as to society. Institutional children’s care, education, and health

are considered economic obligational burdens. This can lead to children's needs and official support being neglected, most often, this is seen in authorities cutting funds directed towards children's needs such as education and children's welfare. Merging schools, decreasing funding towards special education, reduction in extracurricular activities, and cuts towards after-school programs are typical victims of spending cuts and a decline in funding towards social supporting staff and programs aimed at marginalised children (Zelizer, 1985). Juxtaposing that, in a state of economic prosperity, children are viewed as a future human capital investment, justified spending current capital because it is viewed as an economic investment (Zelizer, 1985). That is not to say that all cultures and societies shape policies solely on the economic state at hand. Many other complex social- and cultural factors determine how societies place value on children (Zelizer, 1985). Along with economic conditions, these factors can for example range from a society's view on family structure to factors like gender roles (Zelizer, 1985). To summarise, Viviana Zelizer's work on the worth of children states that value is not only placed on children adhering to what economic state the relevant society is in but rather is the economic value of children tied with multiple intertwining social- and cultural factors. Relevant to this, Bandelj and Spiegel (2022) further expand on Zelizer's work by positing that children are seen, as Gary Becker would suggest, a human capital investment. Gary Becker states that *human capital* is "activities in the present that affect future well-being" (1964). Exploring children's human capital is important in relevance to children who have incarcerated parents, as studies frequently outline that authorities should focus on investment in those children now to curtail any abnormal behavioural patterns in the future, which are costly to society. Such economically rationalistic views of children's value is debatable as it can negate the humanistic value of children, but it is nonetheless important to note as Western societies, Iceland included, are highly dependent on economic rationale when it comes to policy-making. Bandelj and Spiegel (2022) suggest that children are not economically useless, as posited by Zelizer's concept describing the shift from pre-industrial to industrial societies, but rather a "*useful-to-be child*", focusing on investing in the child so that its future will be economically beneficial in the future.

4. Methodology

In this chapter, I will discuss the methods used to collect and analyse the data used for this thesis. The data collected for this research was mainly gathered in the summer of 2022.

Initially, the data was used for a report written for the ombudsman of children in Iceland examining the social reality, assistance, and facilities offered to children with parents in prison.

The data for the report consisted of results from a questionnaire sent to all Iceland prisons and a halfway home. The questionnaire will not be discussed in any length due to its irrelevance to this study. Eight interviews were conducted with prisoners in two of the four prisons in Iceland. Additionally, an interview with a relative of a prisoner was conducted. The third mode of data collection consisted of visual content gathered by taking pictures of the facilities used. The questionnaire provided important insight into what aspects incarcerated parents were happy and dissatisfied with regarding the visiting areas and support provided for their children. Additionally, the questionnaire was to be a formal count of how many children with currently incarcerated parents are in Iceland, something that has been unknown. Ultimately this endeavour failed as participation was very poor in the two larger prisons. Although aspects of the questionnaire's purpose failed, it provided valuable insight into features that would be valuable in the interviews. To gather insight into the lived experiences of the interlocutors, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as they prove a good tool in allowing interviewees to express their thoughts more freely. An in-depth exploration of the participants' experience was essential as the topic of parental incarceration, especially with a focus on the children, had not been researched too an extensive regard. Lastly, visual data in the form of pictures of the facilities was collected to subsidise the interlocutors' recounts.

While the subject matter is undoubtedly an extension of the report written for the Icelandic Ombudsman of Children, the manner in which its data is interpreted diverges as it is grounded in a specific theoretical framework. In contrast, the report written for the Ombudsman eschews any theoretical underpinnings. The report's aim was not to showcase profound theoretical insights but rather to draw attention to the lived experiences of children with incarcerated parents in both social and physical contexts.

4.1 Research Area

The observational data, discussion based as well as visual, were collected from all four of the prisons in Iceland. There are two closed prisons in Iceland; Litla-Hraun and Hólmsheiði, and two open prisons; Kvíabryggja and Sogn. Three prisons are located quite close to each other

on the south coast. Litla-Hraun and Sogn are located a convenient 45 minutes from Reykjavík and situated even closer is Hólmsheiði, right on the outskirts of Reykjavík. Kvíabryggja is the only prison located quite far away from the capital. It is placed right by the alluring mountain of Kistufell and the town of Grundarfjörður.

Litla-Hraun is the most populous prison in Iceland, having room for 87 prisoners, and is also the oldest prison in Iceland, built in the year 1929 as a hospital for tuberculosis patients. Being the oldest prison in Iceland and additionally, not being built with the purpose of incarceration of individuals taking place there, many refurbishments and alterations have had to be made. Located beside Litla-Hraun is the children's cottage (í barnakot). Barnkot will be discussed further below. The actual visiting hall inside the prison has been scrutinised for its poor conditions, especially for children. As such, most parents opt for using the children's cottage, although not without critique on its use as well.

Hólmsheiði is as mentioned previously, located right outside the city limits of Reykjavík. Hólmsheiði is the newest prison in Iceland, taken into use in the year 2016, and is the only prison in Iceland built for its purpose, incarcerating individuals. Hólmsheiði provides nuances to the Icelandic carceral system, one of which is an apartment, built for family overnight stays. However, lack of regulation means that the apartment has never been used by families for such use.

Sogn is as stated previously an open prison. Being an open prison, there are no physical barriers to entering the prison. Originally built as a home for the mentally handicapped, Sogn does not bear any signs of being a prison upon entry. Sogn is located in a small but beautiful valley, providing a friendly first encounter with the premises. Sogn has no actual visiting area but children are allowed to go anywhere within the building provided that they do not leave the sight of their parents (Fangelisismálastofnun.is/heimsoknir). The issue of no actual visiting area has proved to be an issue for many prisoners which will be discussed further in another chapter.

Kvíabryggja is an open prison, located around 180 kilometres from Reykjavik on the Snæfellsnes peninsula right next to Grundarfjörður. Its location is alluring, situated right below the mountain Kirkjufell. As is the case with Sogn, Kvíabryggja has no barriers indicating that it is a prison. Kvíabryggja was originally built as a work camp for fathers who owed child support payments and as such, does not look like a typical prison. As is the case in Sogn, there are no proper visiting areas. Prior to the year 2007, there was a room dedicated to family visits, but it was closed down and altered to make room for more prisoners.

4.2 Visual Criminology

As in many other disciplines, using visual content in the form of pictures and videos in many forms has become increasingly popular in criminology. Using visual aid in criminology can be a powerful tool for research (Brookman & Copes, 2018). Regarding the original data collection, its purpose was to influence policy, demonstrating and highlighting to the Ministry of Justice as well as the prisons and parole office how poor the family visiting conditions were. This use is currently one of the more common uses of visual criminology and has been touted as “*Most often associated with scholarship around the power of images to shape public opinion* (Wheeldon & Harris, 2015: 4).

Using visual data in influencing policy has grown increasingly popular within criminology. As explained by Brookman & Copes (2018) and Jacob Riis’s (1996) work in capturing the conditions of the urban poor in The United States led to social reform with the purpose of helping the people living within these poor living standards (Brookman & Copes, 2018: 1). The used visual data collected for the report written in the summer of 2022 had precisely the same purpose. Pictures and videos can be much more powerful than the written word in presenting what the researcher has witnessed. Visual methods in criminology also provide the researcher with tools to analyse the subject at hand. Hayler and Natarajan (2006) suggest that visual methods provide researchers with a new insight to demonstrate to readers, be those the criminal experiences or the conditions they live in. Hayler and Natarajan also state that these efforts are a great tool in challenging the current methods of punishment and narratives about criminality (Hayler & Natarajan, 2016)

For actual data collecting for this research, pictures of the visiting areas were taken to demonstrate their conditions. Taking pictures in the open prisons of Sogn and Kvíabryggja proved to be quite difficult as there is no actual visiting area. Instead, pictures were taken of the areas used for visiting, according to the interlocutors. In the closed prisons of Litla-Hraun and Hólmsheiði, pictures were taken of the family visiting room as to demonstrate the conditions of those rooms. As has been previously mentioned, visual data collection in criminology provides the researcher with nuanced methods of presenting data. In this study, it is in my opinion that visual aid is not necessarily essential but significant in presenting the data collected. As I have presented the visual data before in a seminar in front of parents of

children who have been incarcerated parents, other stakeholders, and academics, I found that presenting the visual data drew meaningful attention towards the other data presented.

As access to participants in the research was quite limited and connections difficult to establish, collecting visual data became an intriguing way of supplementing the data collected by the interviews and questionnaires. The purpose of my internship at the office of the Ombudsman of Children in Iceland was to present the conditions of the family visiting areas in Icelandic prisons as well as what assistance they are provided with outside the prison. Collecting data from different points with different methodologies provided substantially more data.

Ultimately, the original point of collecting visual data for the written report for the ombudsman was, as previously mentioned, to influence policy. In this continuation of the report, visual data will be presented to highlight the conditions and provide context to the reader.

4.3 Interviews

To grasp a better understanding of the lived experiences behind having children come to visit you as an incarcerated person, I found that interviewing those with experience of the family visiting system would hopefully provide profound information on the matter. As previously mentioned, the interviews were conducted with eight presently incarcerated prisoners who have children, as well as one family member of an incarcerated individual. The interviews with the prisoners were carried out within the open prisons of Sogn and Kvíabryggja. A request to interview prisoners in the closed prisons of Litla-Hraun and Hólmsheiði was also sent to the prison director but access was regrettably denied. Each of the prisoners had previously spent time within either of the closed prisons, thereby allowing them to offer valuable insight into their visitation experiences within those prisons. It was important that the interviews not only encompassed the perspectives of those incarcerated in open prisons, no matter how important they were but also captured the experiences of the visiting areas inside the closed prisons. This was essential given the considerable difference in confinement and visitation rules and regulations, facilities, duration of stay, environment, and physical structure between the open and closed prisons.

4.4 Positionality

Researching those who have been stigmatised through their deviant behaviour provides necessary reflection regarding positionality. Reflecting upon my position regarding the incarcerated interlocutors was highly important, as they are one of, if not the most stigmatised group in Icelandic society. As I had not had any previous experience of prisons, the prisons and parole system or prisoners in general, I approached the interviews from an outsider's perspective. Generally, reflexivity assumes that the researcher is aware of their own value, self-identity, or ideologies. Personal reflexivity is important as well as interpersonal reflexivity. Personal reflexivity refers to the researcher examining their own background and assumptions and how those factors influence and disrupt the research process (Hesse-Biber & Leaby, 2006: 146). Moreover, interpersonal reflexivity refers to the relationship that is formed between the researcher and the interlocutor and how that might influence knowledge creation (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). For example, when meeting one of the interlocutors, they mentioned a person that we both knew. According to the interlocutor, our mutual assured them that I was trustworthy and thus took any doubt away from them that I wouldn't treat the subject matter delicately. This also proved to be empowering for me as a researcher as I felt that this created a more open and trusting relationship with one another.

Approaching the interviews from an outsider's perspective provides challenges. Not only do prisoners recount stories and experiences that are sometimes hard to grasp but as with any other community, they have a special way of saying and doing things. Understanding the lived experiences of an incarcerated person can be difficult as their lived experiences, community, roles, rules, and lingo, are different from what most people encounter.

As previously mentioned, the interviews with the eight prisoners took place inside their respected open prisons, being, Sogn and Kvíabryggja. Before the interviews were conducted, I had contacted the directors of the prisons. The reason is to state my purpose and ask a few questions about what limitations or challenges I could meet. Fortunately, in Sogn and Kvíabryggja I was welcomed with open arms and the prisoners knew beforehand who I was and what my purpose was. It was imperative for me as a researcher to emphasise that exact point. I am a researcher, not a government agent nor anyone working for the Prison and Parole offices. As a pretext for conducting the interviews, I thought it was imperative that this fact was highlighted. I wanted the prisoners to know that I was there for them and that I was

there with the purpose of helping them and their children. Trust in the government and PPO is, understandably, not always strong. Distancing myself from the government and the PPO was thus something I took special care of doing. Fortunately, my directions towards the directors of the prisons followed through and the interviewees greeted me without any presumptions that I was there in any way other than to highlight their and their children's experiences. In the interviews with the prisoners I again highlighted my position in the hopes of building trust with them.

As the environment and surroundings were utterly foreign to me, as well as being influenced by stigmatised images of prisons, I was nervous about my first encounters, taking place in the open prison of Sogn. My initial stress and apprehension dissipated quickly as I took my first interview. The manner in which the interlocutor articulated their narrative and the way they communicated their concern and opinions immediately felt to me as they were as interested in the subject and its outcomes as I was, if not more. Adding to that. What helped eliminate any presumptions of the incarcerated interlocutors was the fact that the interviews were not focused on their crimes, but rather on their positions as parents who have opinions on family visiting areas and their children's welfare regarding the conditions and support afforded to them.

Positioning as a researcher and an ally can open new doors. Limiting the rift between the interviewer and interviewee can often provide a better environment for the interlocutors, presenting a space where the person on the opposing side of the questions feels comfortable enough to speak their mind, free of judgement (Sandberg & Copes, 2012). Furthermore, the reflexive turn emphasises the need to deny the objective, neutral position as a researcher (Sandberg & Copes, 2012). In this regard, I was unafraid to vocalise my thoughts on the discussed subject. With that in mind, I did not try to influence my opinion of the subject to the best of my ability. As mentioned, no one can stay truly neutral, and I agree with the premise that simply asking questions and probing can influence the way in which participants answer. In my interviews, I scoffed, exclaimed, shook and nodded my head at the sometimes-shocking remarks they recounted. Not only does that clearly influence the way in which the interview is being conducted, but it does also provide the interviewees a better space to communicate their beliefs. Being "stone-faced" is simply unproductive. Becker (1967) claimed that "taking sides" in examining the social world is inevitable. Disclosing our personal and political views on the subject is thus essential and, in continuation of that, using the proper methods and

theories (Mendez, 2023). The most challenging aspect of the interviews was asking questions regarding delicate subjects, especially regarding stigmatisation. Not only is the concept of stigmatisation not necessarily something that all interviewees were familiar with, but during the discussions I found myself being afraid of coming across as reinforcing their already stigmatised attributes.

4.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used in gathering the data from the interviews. Thematic analysis provides the researcher with tools to identify patterns, themes and meaning when collecting data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The data collection and subsequent thematic analysis of that data provided me with the flexibility required to gain profound insight into the nuanced narrative given by the interlocutors. The study follows the reflexive process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019), in which the construction of codes comes first, and themes are constructed from the codes.

The analysis itself started right after the interviews were taken. As I had to travel to all prisons in Iceland, I used the commuting time to listen to the interviews and note the initial themes and patterns that could be used for the analysis. The last interview was taken much later, in December of 2022, and was not a part of the results from the report written for the Ombudsman of Children in Iceland. After the last interview was conducted, I translated the transcriptions from Icelandic to English.

In analysing the data itself, I colour-coded all the themes that could possibly be used and found that they could be presented as a part of three more prominent themes.

Initial patterns emerged in the form of characteristics of parental incarceration (5.1), experiences of stigmatisation (5.2), and lastly, the ways in which parents would want to change the current system regarding parental incarceration (5.3). Subsections were then created.

To mitigate the chances of the analysis missing any critical codes and themes, the analysis itself consisted of reading and re-reading the transcripts, as well as listening to the interviews in Icelandic more than once re-introducing myself to the material proved to be essential in finding additional codes. Dey (1993) suggests that the analysis of data is not a linear process, but much rather a circular one, where tasks are repeated, which subsequently allows the

researcher to go deeper into the subject at hand. Throughout the data analysis, Dey's suggestion proved essential.

4.6 Limitations

Limitations regarding the research revolve around several factors. Firstly, children were not included in this study. Although the study examines the family visiting areas with children in mind, what support is provided to children, and what changes are needed, none of the interviews were conducted with children. This provides an obvious limitation to the study, as their direct experiences and thoughts were not examined, but rather those from the point of their parents.

Researching children can be more complex and delicate than adults, so stricter ethical grounds apply. This is especially true when researching a subject such as prisoners and prisons, which is a sensitive topic even before adding children into the sum (Saunders, McArthur & Moore, 2015).

An additional limitation in the form of not having access to prisoners from all the prisons meant that I could only interview currently incarcerated individuals from the open prisons of Sogn and Kvíabryggja. This seemed to be a significant flaw with the research, however, all the prisoners imprisoned in open prisons, have also been incarcerated in closed prisons, either Litla-Hraun or Hólmsheiði. Recounts of the family visiting areas inside the closed prisons are thus told from prisoners who were at the time of the interviews incarcerated in open prisons.

Another limitation of the research is the fact that none of the prisoners interviewed were mothers. One mother was interviewed, however, she is not a prisoner but a prisoner's family member. This is mainly a fault of the fact that of those incarcerated in Icelandic prisons at the time of the research, only six identified as women. Furthermore, most of them were in custody but not sentenced. This does not only provide a view that is influenced by the interlocutor's experience as fathers, a role that often differs from the experiences of mothers, but moreover, research has suggested that there is a substantial difference in how mothers experience visitation from their children. From that point, one could assume that there could possibly be a considerable difference in how mothers describe their children's visiting experience, how the environment of the prisons influences experience and what they would like changes they would like to see and how they and their experience their children's visits.

4.7 Ethical Concerns

As an increase in academic emphasis has been put on the research on the parental status of prisoners, subsequent emphasis has also presented itself in research on the children of said prisoners (Saunderss, McArthur & Moore, 2015). For this research, it was decided not to interview children as the topic of parental imprisonment is highly sensitive and might put an emotional strain on the child (Saunderss, McArthur & Moore, 2015). Researchers are responsible for the participant's protection, and although some researchers have conducted interviews with children who have incarcerated parents about the sensitive topic of imprisonment and how that affects the child itself, the sensitivity of the subject matter made it clear that this research would not include children. Research including children needs to be particularly child centred. As someone who works with marginalised families and children, knowing how difficult it is for many children to participate in conversations about sensitive issues, be it the imprisonment of parents or other topics, it was decided to focus on the experiences from the outset of the parents. However, dismissing children from research centring on them can be an unethical act (Moore et al., 2011). Excluding children from research on them denies the children's lived experiences to be recounted directly and subsequently better acted upon. It is thus profoundly important that additional research is done on the subject matter, conducted in a child-friendly manner. This is especially true regarding the topic of children of prisoners, as they have been called, as mentioned earlier, the silent victims of incarceration. Saunderss, McArthur & Moore (2015) emphasise the importance of disclosing why the children themselves are not made participants in research concerning them. As mentioned earlier, children can be especially vulnerable and must thus be protected. Finding ways to retain their innocence is highly important.

Although including children in research concerning them is profoundly important, it is no less important that the interview considers the researchers' skills and knowledge in navigating research that includes children (Eddy & Reid, 2002). Considering all of these factors and the fact that searching for children who have incarcerated parents who are able to partake in interviews surrounding the topic, it was decided to dismiss the inclusion of children in this research. This means that this research does not address the first-hand recounts of children.

Visual criminology also provides ethical concerns for the researcher. In dealing with, if not sensitive, entirely illegal activity, anonymity is profoundly important. In the case of this

research, ethical concerns regarding the interviewees are irrelevant as I did not take any pictures of the interviewees, their personal belongings nor their personal space.

5. Results

In what follows, the results will be discussed in three distinct chapters. Firstly, what characterises parental incarceration in Iceland? Secondly, how stigmatisation affects children of incarcerated parents and how it is managed. Lastly, the third section will demonstrate on which grounds the interviewees would influence change in the current system regarding children's visiting.

5. 1 What characterises parental incarceration in Iceland?

We begin by exploring how the parents reflect on their experiences with parental incarceration. The themes that will be featured here focus on parents feeling that the system is letting them and their children down, difficulties with being incarcerated far away from their children and finally, how the substandard conditions of facilities and lack of adequate support evoke feelings of disrespect, both towards the children as well as the parents.

5.1.1 Feelings of being let down by the system.

“There should be a system that just kicks in.”

The above quote highlights an issue common to the point of parental incarceration and what support the children are granted. Wallis and Dennison (2015) mention that a lack of a centralised network often occurs when a parent is incarcerated regarding his children. Braman (2002) notes that the state often neglects and ignores its role in incarceration and its effects on the incarcerated persons' immediate surroundings, such as their children.

Before the data collection, one of the aspects known to the team operating under the Ombudsman for Children in Iceland was the fact that there was, to the Ombudsman's knowledge, no active social service, be it governmental assistance, a non-governmental organisation or an association, that specifically address the needs of children who have

incarcerated parents. It was one of the main motivation points for the research conducted for the original report. An additional purpose for the report written for the ombudsman was to establish an account of the number of children with an incarcerated parent. In many European countries, prisons, the nation's respective PPO or an association linked with the families of prisoners collect the number of children. *Children of Prisoners Europe* has collected the number of children in many European countries. Regrettably, Iceland is not one of those countries. This issue is of great concern as it ignores the size and relevance of a highly vulnerable group.

As mentioned in previous chapters, organisations such as those operating in Scandinavia and Finland have benefitted children in need considerably by navigating and managing stigma, acquiring information, and searching where they can access additional assistance (Smith, 2015). Recounts of disappointment with the system were, thus, unsurprisingly, one of the first themes noted when thematising the data from the interviews and questionnaires.

As mentioned by Wallis and Dennison (2015), the criminal justice system's approach to children is that the children of those whom the criminal justice system has incarcerated are best left to "*other areas of social welfare*". Additionally, Wallis and Dennison mention that this can lead to a decentralised process regarding the children where both systems can subsequently neglect them. In the case of Anna's husband's incarceration, she recounted her experience of her husband's arrest and the lack of official support granted to her and her children.

"It is really shocking looking back and realising that there was nobody there, there was, child services did not call me, nobody checked on the children...nobody checked on the children, and that is heartbreaking.

Anna describes the lack of centralised child support for her children as they were put in a potentially traumatising situation. As well as expressing disappointment towards her children's lack of systematic assistance, Anna emphasised the traumatic event that occurred to her and that social services should immediately butt in.

"And then there's the other thing, I have a nervous breakdown, but luckily, I recover pretty quickly, but anyways, there I am, having a nervous breakdown, nobody comes to check on me, and even more critical, NOBODY comes to see if I am emotionally or physically able to take

care of my children. It is a nervous breakdown following a traumatic event, not enough for someone to check on the kids or myself.

Anna's recount emphasises Wallis's point, and it is evident that no centralised support mechanism takes place to benefit the children. As mentioned in this essay, incarceration does not only affect the arrested individual. Still, as in the case of Anna and her children, it potentially has traumatic effects on those closely related to the arrested individual. Building on this, Anna expresses that the safety and conditions of children should in certain cases be dealt with more extremely.

“Let's just say that I was using (drugs) at the time, like it's highly relevant to the case. In that case, no one is there to check on the children. That is heartbreaking. - Anna

5.1.2 Distance from loved ones

Distance from love-ones can determine the child's and the parent's well-being while the parent is incarcerated (Folk, et. al, 2019). Iceland can be considered a relatively large island, although its population is heavily concentrated within and around the Reykjanes peninsula, around the capital area. As has been mentioned, three of the four prisons are not too far away from the capital area, where two-thirds of the population lives, and even more, if we count in the towns close to the capital area. Thus, it is sensible that most prisons are not located far away from the capital region. This does not suggest that everyone in Iceland lives close to the capital. If the prisoners' family or loved ones live in Iceland's northern, north-western or eastern areas, the distance issue becomes more relevant. Two interlocutors who at the time were imprisoned and one family member noted that the family's distance from the prisons was challenging to navigate.

Jón, one of the interlocutors who, at the time, was currently serving time in the open prison of Kvíabryggja, recounted his experience of Litla-Hraun.

“I was locked up for six months, and they could never visit. My wife and family live up north, so I could never get a visit from them. The first visit I got was after a year, here in Kvíabryggja, after a whole year, I saw my kids”.

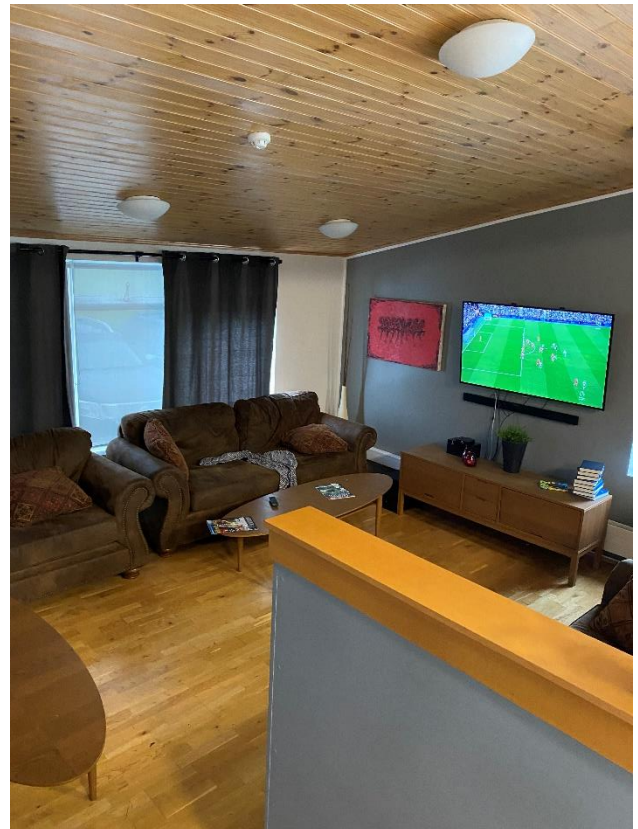
According to Jón, the issue of distance was not the sole reason for him not receiving visitation but also that the children's visiting area in Litla-Hraun, called Barnakot (e. Children's cottage), is only open on weekdays, tying to the previously mentioned problem of *lack of amenities*.

Before 2020, a prison operated in Akureyri, the largest town in the northern area, but it has since been closed due to a lack of funding (Fangelsismálastofnun.is/heimsoknir). In inquiries sent to the Icelandic PPO, lack of funding is the reason for their lack of resources and efforts to improve both the social support for children, housing, and amenities inside the prisons for families and additional support for parents.

Pétur, a man in his early thirties who has been incarcerated for around two years recounts the issue of distance, and how it has affected his and his daughter's relationship. Pétur has not seen his daughter for the entire time he has been incarcerated but according to him, their relationship was very strong and loving before his imprisonment.

“She wants to come and visit, and this place is super safe (he is in kvíabryggja, an open prison). I've even shown her around on my phone and to her mom too, and even when there were some kids here, parents are often getting their kids here.”

Pétur's issue revolves around two common factors regarding children's visiting. Firstly, the children of prisoners often become a centre of dispute for separated parents (Arditti & Beckmeyer, 2018), with the non-incarcerated parent being unsure of the child's safety. Secondly, Pétur notes that the distance, as in the case of Jón, plays the most significant role in him not seeing his children. Distance from loved ones is considered one of the significant plights of imprisonment, which can dramatically affect the relationship between the prisoner and their family. In co-parenting, Arditti and Beckmeyer (2018) have noted that imprisoned individuals are highly dependent on their relationship being good with their current or former



Picture 1. This is the largest common area in Kvíabryggja. There is no designated family room in Kvíabryggja which can produce concerns for parents.

partner with whom they share a child. Pétur's recounts reaffirm many studies that have researched the effect of what is called "*Maternal Gatekeeping*". As prisoners are, as mentioned previously, often dependent on the quality of their relationship with their current or former partner, with the quality of the relationship dictating whether incarcerated individuals are likely to get to spend time with their children (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Not only does this affect the incarcerated parents who have desires to meet and spend time with their children, but this also has negative implications for the child who wants to spend time with their incarcerated parent. As will be touched upon later in the results chapter, a common theme regarding the needs and wants of children is that they are often reliant on the decision making of adults. Consequentially, rendering them powerless in the adult world.

Anna's recount regarding distance is relevant to her children's age. Anna and her husband have many children, some of whom are very young. According to Anna, the issue of travel distance in conjunction with the amount of time spent with their father in the children's cottage, provides them and especially their younger children with a frustrating experience,

"With the youngest one, he's a bit of a daddy's boy. It's unfortunate because we drive over there, and he's very hyper and excited and all over the place, and when he finally settles down a bit, we need to leave. Drive for one and a half hours. That's no time. You don't get to spend any quality time".

Although the distance Anna must drive with their children to visit the children's father is not as far as in the case of Pétur and Jón, she notes the strain that the amount of time has on herself and the children, especially the youngest one. In Rubenstein, Toman & Cochran (2018), the authors note that the incarcerated individuals' families can experience their own form of punishment as an additional strain is added to their lives. The distance can provide a further strain for many family members of incarcerated individuals as in the case of Anna and her children, she drives an hour and a half at least once a week.



Picture 2. This is Barnakot (e. children's cottage). The interlocutors summarize it as small, rusty and mouldy, however better than alternatives.

5.1.3 Feelings of Disrespect

Some interlocutors spoke of the disrespect they felt towards them and their children in regard to the visiting areas they are provided with. The feelings of disrespect range from the prisons offering poor physical structures to conditions that go against children's modesty, adhering to the fact that children are often unable to voice their opinions and views. Arnór recounts his experience with the children's cottage and the visiting hall inside the prison.

“No it really is vile. Do not get me wrong.... it is a lot better than the one in the visiting area corridor, but you walk in, it is tiny and rusty and smells of mould. It is a lot better than trying to spend some family time, and you can hear a couple fucking in the next room (referring to the family room in the visiting hall).It is a slap in the face” - Arnór

When asked if Anna has had to use the family visiting area in Litla-Hraun she stated, *“Yeah in Litla-Hraun yeah, and you can hear everyone fucking there, very thrilling. You just get embarrassed there...You cannot always get the children's cottage, so we've had to use it, it's so disrespectful and utterly absurd that this is what they're offering the children.*

Anna confirms Arnór's experience with the visiting conditions of Litla-Hraun and concurs with his feelings of disrespect towards the children. In decision and policy making towards the benefit of children, scholars have noted that children are in constant danger of being neglected due to their role in society. This role is typically voiceless and powerless (Welch, 1996). This can lead to conditions of neglect towards them which would normally not stand if the situation was designed for the modesty of adults.

Three critical areas of parental incarceration in Iceland were explored to summarise this chapter. Firstly, a system that lets parents down. Parents feel as though there should be a systematic operation that commences regarding incarceration that takes care of the children, that is to say, there should be centralised support for children who have incarcerated parents from the moment of incarceration. Parents note that there is no actual support regarding parental incarceration. Wallis and Dennison (2015) state that instead of centralised support, authorities place



Picture 3. The conjugal visiting rooms in Litla-Hraun

responsibility solely on the hands of the parents, although the disruption of the family's structure is disrupted by state intervention. Secondly, distance from loved ones means that some parents have a challenging time navigating visitation for themselves and their children. This could lead to multiple negative consequences for children, especially to those in good relations with their parents before incarceration. Thirdly, interviewees noted the disrespect they feel that they and their children experience towards the visiting conditions afforded to them, due to unacceptable facilities and amenities.

5.2 Experiencing and Managing Stigmatisation

Erving Goffman described *stigma* as the condition of an individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance (Goffman, 1963). In examining the relationship between prisoners and their children, the topic of stigma is highly relevant given that research has highlighted its role as a primary catalyst for negative experiences following parental incarceration. Courtesy stigma, as mentioned in the chapter outlining the theoretical framework, refers to stigma being experienced not by virtue of the individuals themselves demonstrating stigmatised behaviour but instead being stigmatised by association with a stigmatised individual (Goffman, 1963). This is highly relevant to the stigma experienced by children of incarcerated individuals, as the children have not displayed any stigmatised behaviour themselves but receive stigmatisation from being closely associated with their parents. This section will discuss themes surrounding stigmatisation, how children who have incarcerated parents have experienced stigmatisation, and how they subsequently manage that stigma.

5.2.1 Experiences of Stigma

Stigma affects the parent's children in different ways. To his knowledge, Jón's kids do not experience stigma following his incarceration, due to their age.

“My kids are very little, so that (experiencing stigma) hasn't really been an issue, they don't really know what's going on, they just think I am always working on this farm”.

Jón follows a common tactic of not disclosing why he is not at home to his children. Rather than telling the truth he tells them that he currently lives and works on a farm. As Jón serves

the rest of his time in Kvíabryggja an open prison, there is truth to the inaccuracy as he works on a farm there. However, some reports have suggested that parents' selective non-disclosure can have unfavourable effects on children (McGinley & Jones, 2018). As children experience what has been called an *ambiguous loss*, they would most likely instead benefit from full disclosure from the parent. Ambiguous loss refers to the fact that children experience their parent's incarceration as loss in a way that has no clear comparison (Bockneck, Sanderson & Britner, 2008). There is no actual ritual that takes place as in other cases of experiences of loss and there is generally no outpour of community support for the child who has lost its parent to incarceration (McGinley & Jones, 2018). Disclosing or not disclosing incarceration of a parent, provides parents and other family members with a difficult situation. Children tend to worry about their parents, knowing that they are incarcerated and worry about the following stigmatisation that could possibly occur (Philipps, 2010). On the other hand, research has also demonstrated that children can experience their parent's unwilful departure as an intentional one if they do not disclose why they are not participating in their day-to-day lives anymore (Chiu, et. al, 2021). Furthermore, the parents can also worry about the stigmatisation their child would carry on their behalf and choose not to disclose their imprisonment to the child (Phillips, 2010). The parent's decision to not disclose their incarceration often considers the children's age and how best to navigate the stigmatisation they would possibly encounter. Hiding stigmatisation from others is a common tactic among those who are in danger of being stigmatised (Birembaum, 1970). Some stigmatised characteristics are not as apparent as others. A physical disfigurement, for example, is not as concealable as a mental disability (Grytten, 2005).

Anna's children have experienced courtesy stigma, from peers as well as parents of peers.

“My little boy, there was some bullying but it was taken care of by the school and I don't think it has been happening ever since”.

An important factor in managing stigma for children is a strong social service, dedicated to helping the children (Branfman, 2015). In Anna's case, she was fortunate that her son's school provides support. According to Anna, her teenage daughter has experienced stigmatisation to a higher degree;

“I have an eighteen-year-old daughter, she got it worse I would say. Two of her friend's mothers just completely banned them from seeing my daughter anymore.”

Anna did not find it necessary or helpful to act further on this dismissal of her daughter by her peer's parents stating, *“We all have it quite good though”*. Stigmatisation can provide especially great difficulty for children and younger individuals. In addition to a disruption to their usual family fabric, the stigmatisation that follows can significantly impact their relationship with peers (Phillips, 2010). Moreover, children who have incarcerated parents are also in danger of being stigmatised by the parents of their peers, as seen in the case of Anna's children. This draws us back to courtesy stigma. People stigmatise other individuals on behalf of their close peers, in this case, the child's parent. This can be especially difficult to manage for children as they are often directly aligned by their community to their parent's actions (Hannem, 2008). In this way, children who have imprisoned parents often get labelled with negative traits. Such as being troublemakers or having a negative impact on other children (Hannem, 2008).

5.2.2. Managing Stigma by Revealing it to Others

“I think our method has always been to keep things upfront with everyone. We're not hiding anything. We have always just tried to keep things up front. And I hear a lot of people talking very nicely about us. We've returned the shame as they say. - Anna

As noted in the theoretical section Leary defines *passing*, as a *“cultural performance whereby one member of a defined social group masquerades as another in order to enjoy the privileges afforded to the dominant group”* (Leary, 1999: 1). Interestingly, this correlates very poorly to the case of Anna and her family who have chosen the other route thoroughly, that is to say, they have chosen to reveal their social role to all. According to Anna, this decision has not led to them losing their social status or social support, but on the contrary, led to her being able to attain more support for her family. Anna uses the Icelandic phrase, *“skilum skömmini”* (e. Return the shame), which was popularised in the #metoo movement in an effort to empower those victimised by sexual abuse. Since then, it has been used in other areas of victimhood.

Research has shown that children who have incarcerated parents are in increased danger of being bullied by their peers (Phillips & Gate, 2011). In an effort to avoid their children's stigmatisation by their peers and others, such as their peers parents, the children's parents are often tempted, as mentioned earlier, choose to not disclose the whereabouts of their incarcerated parent in an effort to decrease the likelihood of their child being a victim of stigmatisation (Phillips & Gates, 2011).

There are many ways in which people manage their stigmatised identity. The ways in which individuals choose to do so differ from one another. As mentioned in the theory chapter, two ways of managing stigmatised identities are by either a method of *disclosure* or *passing*. Anna and her children choose to disclose to others their stigmatised identity in an effort to empower themselves. Disclosure can range from a simple notion to a public statement. Anna has utilised both methods, and according to her, their method of managing stigma works.

“I guess that’s why nobody is bothering with teasing the kids or us...And I think that plays a role in why we have so much support” - Anna.

In, *Invisible Punishment: The Collateral Consequences of Mass Imprisonment* (2002), Donald Braman points out that incarceration plays a significant role in placing an additional burden on the family members of an incarcerated individual (Braman, 2002). Subsequently, such injustices for the family members would, under most circumstances, lead to social solidarity and public opposition towards the issue (Braman, 2002). However, stigmatisation, or rather fear of stigmatisation leads many family members of prisoners to conceal the imprisonment or if it has been disclosed, refrain from drawing attention to it (Braman, 2002). Anna has, however, not followed the typical format of concealment in an effort to draw attention to the injustices that she and her children feel that they experience. Reflecting on this, the peculiarities of Icelandic society possibly play a significant role in decision-making. Relative to other countries, Icelandic is not populous, with around 390.000 inhabitants. Communities are typically tight nit in the sense that people are very visible, especially outside of Reykjavik. Regarding stigmatisation, this can lead to word getting out very quickly. Taking ownership of stigmatised traits and seeking support for them can thus be a good tactic in managing said stigmatisation (Braman, 2002)

To summarise this chapter, stigmatisation contributes to parental incarceration by managing said stigma by concealing or revealing said stigma, where courtesy stigma plays a vital role. Parents seek to use particular methods in managing the stigma their children might experience because of their parent’s incarceration. Firstly, parents use concealment as a method of hiding their stigmatised trait in an effort to steer away any courtesy stigma their children might experience. Secondly, parents use disclosure as a method of empowerment for them and their children, in an effort to gather support in regards to the disruption of their family life. Parents on opposite sides of methods in managing stigma for their children note that they believe their

method is successful, however, disclosure had some initial adverse consequences for those children.

5.3 What perspectives and suggestions can parents of incarcerated children provide to improve the experience of parental incarceration for children?

The interviewers reflected on their stance on what policy changes regarding parental incarceration, children's visits and social support given to children who have incarcerated parents. Taking first-hand experiences into account is important in shaping policy that concerns those who are affected by it. The results demonstrate the main topics of policy change centre around the child being at the forefront regarding parental incarceration. This is found firstly in the interlocutor's narrative of keeping the child's innocence. More specifically designing and providing spaces that are appropriate to the modesty of a child. Secondly, centring incarceration policy from the outset of the child's benefit. For example, allowing more time spent at home as it benefits the child, and lastly, emphasising that children who experience parental incarceration should not be met with the attitude of them being a second thought, but much rather a result of the authorities' policies that they should subsequently invest in.

5.3.1 Keeping the child's Innocence.

“The first time you go there (to the prison), I was afraid for them and nervous and its a little scary. You get this feeling of powerlessness. The more often you go the more you get used to it, and the staff is actually very nice although there of course some idiots in every field. But like, for the children, it was not that bad going into the children's cottage (a specially designed structure for children's visiting located outside the prison) because there the kids don't have to go through the search. - Anna

A feature of prison visitations is the search. In closed prisons, the search is conducted in a special room, prior to entering the conjugal visiting area and family areas. This varies between prisons and for example, in the open prisons in Iceland, the children themselves do not have to take part in any special search, except for a quick look in their bags. The open

prisons do not conduct any physical searches unless there is reasonable suspicion of contraband. Scholars have mentioned that child-friendly and nurturing environments can prove to be a key to the child's desire to spend time with their parents in prison. According to Anna, avoiding the search is a major key for her relatively positive attitude towards the children's cottage. In the above quote, Anna recounts the atmosphere of the search room stating that it made her feel fearful for her children. Anna

“Like the first time I went to Litla-Hraun. The really shocking thing I witnessed is that you get this feeling of them violating your children. They aggressively search everything and the kids are really startled. The feeling is like they are treating them as suspects. They have to take off their shoes and there's a search tool. I felt it was completely over-the-top and really unnecessary. - Anna

Anna emphasizes the need of keeping the child's innocence so as to not make the experience unpleasant for the children. This is important as making the experience as pleasant as possible for the children improves the overall experience for the child and subsequently the likelihood of the child wanting to visit more often (Rubenstein, Toman & Cochran, 2022). Keeping the child's innocence is as well important as not implying that the child has done anything wrong. The child might wonder why it is being searched and get a feeling that it is being suspected of something nefarious (Rubenstein, Toman & Cochran, 2018). Furthermore, Anna posits an interesting but radical solution to her concern:

“It's a fact that there will always be drugs in there, they will always get in. Everything is flooding with drugs in Litla-Hraun. Then the question must be asked if a parent is that bad that they try to smuggle drugs on the child, shouldn't the child just walk in? Keep its innocence?”

Interestingly this coincides with the deterministic view of the prison director, who looks at drugs as a social fact of prisons, which cannot be changed. Although an undoubtedly radical step, Anna's suggestion is of the critical kind and suggests that children should always be viewed and treated as innocent beings. This correlates with Rubenstein, Toman and Cochran's (2022) notion that any barrier, be they social, practical or economic can determine the child's will to visit their parent.

5.3.2 Meeting needs of children versus punishing their parents

An essential part of critical criminological theory is examining and re-evaluating punishment (Welch, 1996). Critical criminology is rooted in power relations and class struggle and, as such, aims the current system and its flaws (Welch, 1996). Furthermore, Welch notes that Critical Criminology's aim is not to present a utopian perspective of crime and punishment but rather an invitation to *“recast definitions of social offence more broadly than do traditional criminology, who rarely challenge unnecessary forms of social domination”* (Welch, 1996: 45). In utilising the critical criminological framework, it is important to note the lived experiences of the individuals, families and communities that have suffered because of the current penal system and its approach to justice.

“I can understand if you're a dangerous individual and you're threatening people and stuff like that but if I take my husband as an example, he's not dangerous and they are many, the great fathers that are getting visitations from their kids, just imagine how great it would be for the father to be able to sleep in the same room, spend the evening and the night with his child, and it wouldn't do any harm to the kid nor the prisoner. - Anna

Here, Anna discusses the true purpose of imprisonment and its unintended implications on the prisoner's family, especially the children. As criminal justice efforts have arguably strayed further and further away from looking at punishment as the appropriate tool against deviance, looking at deviance as a societal macro-scale issue has gained traction. As demonstrated by Friedrich (2018), constant critique of the penal system is paramount in improving the system. In this, Friedrich questions the current approach to imprisonment and its actual purpose to limit the effect imprisonment has on those who have not committed any crimes (Friedrich, 2018). This coincides with multiple studies on the topic of children's challenges facing parents' incarceration. Kremer et al. (2021) note the negative impact parental incarceration can have on children's mental health as well as emphasising that, as in the case of Anna's children, further reinforcing a previously positive relationship between the children and their incarcerated parent can have a tremendous positive impact on their mental health (Kremer et al., 2021).

In their critical work examining what effects mass incarceration has on the construction of the family, Arditti (2018) states that incarceration constructs “an unequal playing field”. The stressors following incarceration, additionally, can be experienced as punishment in itself.

Speaking towards that, Jón remarks on his experiences and how he views the prison's neglect as an additional form of punishment for him and his children.

“The situation in Litla-Hraun, I was there. There, the children's visits are only allowed on weekdays, not the weekends, and that should be completely the other way around. It is absolutely absurd. People need to take leave from work, from school, from playschool to come and visit...it's the most ridiculous timing there is. Is this made intentionally?? Is this just to make this harder for everyone?? - Jón”

In line with the same topic, Alfred remarks on his experience, stating that; *“This is not making things easier for nobody, it's just to keep on punishing us (him and his family)”*. Furthermore, Alfred reflects on his child's emotional state as they are far away from their father; *“He cries himself to sleep sometimes”*. The emotional state that children are put through is undoubtedly strenuous. Alfred's remarks are supported by multiple scholarly articles reporting on the issues that follow parental incarceration (Besemer et al., 2019; Flynn et al., 2022; McGinley & Jones, 2018). Loneliness, depression, and anti-social behavioural patterns in multiple forms are all forms of the repercussion of parental incarceration for the children (Besemer et. al, 2019). Alfred's experience not only highlights the pains he experiences as a father not being able to meet his children but also the pains his children feel for him being away. Supporting this, Anna talks about her youngest son, whose father is currently in prison; *“...He misses him every day...some nights he cries all night and says dad, dad, dad.* As noted by multiple scholarly articles on the subject matter of parental imprisonment, the punishment is not only experienced by the incarcerated individual but also by the child who is affected by the incarceration as seen in these cases.

As Ugelvik (2014) states, the pains male prisoners experience while imprisoned are not exclusively directed towards their immediate deprivation of liberty but also how that deprivation affects their societal roles as fathers. Jón's experience with being an incarcerated father has led to his feelings of guilt towards his family, stating, *“And you're so far away, you have major feelings of guilt all of the time”*. As Ugelvik has mentioned, male prisoners experience the pains of imprisonment not only as men but as fathers, and how the disruption of the societal role of being fathers plights male prisoners (Ugelvik, 2014). According to Ugelvik, Jón's feelings of guilt could be explained as existential pain due to the disruption to his societal role as a father. The pains experienced by incarceration are thus not only experienced by the incarcerated in the original way Sykes described. Not only does the

deprivation of liberty lead to the disruption of the father's traditional roles in some societies (Ugelvik, 2014), but it can lead to major adverse effects on children's well-being.

One of the more unanticipated results from the answers to the questionnaires sent to all prisoners in Iceland was the repeated answer that the children's cottage (i. Barnakot) was only open over the weekdays from 12:30 until 15:30. These correlate very poorly with the time that most parents, and children, can visit without missing out on work or school. In an inquiry sent about the matter to the Icelandic *PPO*, they answered that this, unfortunately, was the case, the reason being a lack of funding. Much was written about the closure of the children's cottage over the weekend back in 2015 (Afstaða, 2015). The Ombudsman of Children in Iceland wrote about the matter, stating that according to the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, prison and parole offices should first and foremost take aim at how children are impacted within their decision-making (Umboðsmaður Barna, 2015). Jón and Alfred express their feelings about how the operational times of the children's cottage are made intentionally unpractical to keep punishing them and their families.

I take my kids to the children's cottage every week. I have to take them out of school, but their relationship with their dad has always been great and I think it's more important to cultivate their relationship with their dad...Like, are you kidding me?? It's a blatant offence of the Children's Convention Rights" - Anna

As has been mentioned previously, a plethora of research on the children of prisoners has deduced that encouraging a healthy and stable relationship through visiting parents while they are incarcerated can provide a profound positive effect on the child's wellbeing in the future. Pertaining to improved mental health, positive social capabilities, and decreased likelihood of anti-social behaviour (Ricci, Arini & Naqvi, 2022; Kremer et al., 2021).

Critical criminologists have, as stated previously, continuously emphasised the importance of constant holistic reflection of what incarceration pertains to and how it affects both the incarcerated as well as those who it affects (Welch, 1996). Anna suggests that multiple factors need to be considered when it comes to children, focusing on the fact that their father's incarceration should in no way harm their children. Having to take the children out of school for a whole day once a week can certainly be used to change the time that the children's cottage should be open. Not only is it possible that subsequently, the children will fall behind

on school subjects, but also possibly force them to reveal their otherwise hidden stigmatised traits.

Reflecting upon restorative justice, Anna states *“I think also, that the ones that get to spend some time with their children at home would just return to the prisons happier”*. Although visits to home are permitted for prisoners in Iceland, they are typically reserved for special occasions such as a close relative's wedding, a religious confirmation, or birthdays for their children under particular circumstances. In Anna's experience, prisoners gain much but lose little from spending more time at home with their children. This is in line with critical criminological thought as scholars have demonstrated that additional family time and home visits can help with the prisoner's rehabilitation (Song, Woo, Lee & Cochran. 2018). Additionally, Anna remarks, *“I think that for the children, it would be ideal that they (prisoners who are parents) could show that they are trustworthy, it does so much for both of them. It helps him (the child) and (my husband) when he's allowed to come home for a visit”*.

Building on this, Anna states; *“I think that for the prisoners and particularly for the children, if they are behaving, the thing is I don't understand why not try it (provide prisoners the opportunity to spend time at home with their children). Hey, you can go home on Saturday and come back at this time...and if he's not going to behave, then we know that and he can't be trusted for the moment, and he's not going to go anywhere. We live in a small country, nobody is going to swim away from here...”*.

Anna's radical view of prison policy embodies the criticism that it has gathered within critical criminology's view of the prison. Her experiences and attitude towards prisons and how it affects her children and the injustices that follow parental incarceration. Scholars have time and time again noted that imprisonment is not only a severely ineffective as a tool for restorative justice and rehabilitation (Welch, 1996) but also, that by employing incarceration as the primary response to social disorder, families of incarcerated individuals experience harm in a significant way as their family structure has been distorted, both economically and emotionally (Braman, 2002).

Arnór is a father of five. His children are in good hands according to him, but they have not visited him in the open prison of Sogn since he was transferred there. Their relationship was

good prior to his incarceration. From the questionnaire sent to Sogn, a common concern from those confined there was the fact that their partners, as well as themselves, did not feel as though it was entirely safe for their children to visit due to the number of individuals incarcerated there who have been sentenced for child abuse. Sogn does not provide the prisoners and their families a proper visiting area, so it is not uncommon as one interviewee stated; *“There’s every chance that the kid is going to be around a child abuser”*. Instead of a visiting area, children are allowed to spend time in the actual prison wherever the prisoner is allowed to go. This fact makes many parents so uncomfortable that even though they agree with the importance of nurturing the parental relationship, they decide that it is the child’s best interest not to visit.

I just think it’s backward, to think so little of the children. I did bad things and you know okay fine. I have five kids and she (his ex-wife) is alone with them, they get help from the family fortunately, but they want to come. I just think it’s so much more important, they just want to meet their dad you know, and- they can and all, but we just think the circumstances aren’t acceptable. It needs to get fixed. I understand my ex-wife very well, completely, but it’s also hard for the kids. You just get sick of things here and the system and all. Why can’t it just not get fixed, is it really hard?? Nope. - Arnór

Arnór reflects on his imprisonment and how it affects his children. According to him and other inmates at Sogn, the previously mentioned worry many parents have regarding the safety of children while visiting parents at Sogn is clear. Arnór has a clear disdain for the situation at hand and feels as though the punishment is not only amplified towards him but realized by proxy of his children, who have a desire to visit him. Scholars have, throughout the last decades, pondered upon the actual punishment prisoners experience. Graham Sykes most notably wrote about *the pains of imprisonment* in 1958, hypothesising what deprivations of daily life prisoners come to experience while incarcerated (Sykes, 1958). Arnór clearly notes that his punishment is not only lived through the obvious deprivation of freedom but the additional displeasure of his children being mistreated.

Sven reflected on the same topic as Arnór.

And you know, as you see, it is not a bad place to spend some time really, it is beautiful here, and you can play football with your kids and the swings and that. Many people just don’t trust

it because of the white swans (a term used for prisoners who have been sentenced for child abuse). It's a complete shame. - Sven

Although the results of the questionnaire sent to all prisoners currently serving time in Iceland will not be discussed in any detailed way in this essay, it provided grounds for knowing what initial elements regarding their children they were most concerned with. With that in mind, it was unsurprising that what concerned Sven the most was sharing space with child offenders while his children were visiting. The delicate details of child abusers, their punishment, and their place in the carceral system will not be discussed further, however, their presence in the current setting in Sogn clearly affects many prisoners and their children. Sven feels the mismanagement or lack of structure towards children's visits means that many families do not feel the prison provides a safe enough environment. Again, this highlights the neglect of the group's needs.

5.3.3 The Value of Children who have Incarcerated Parents

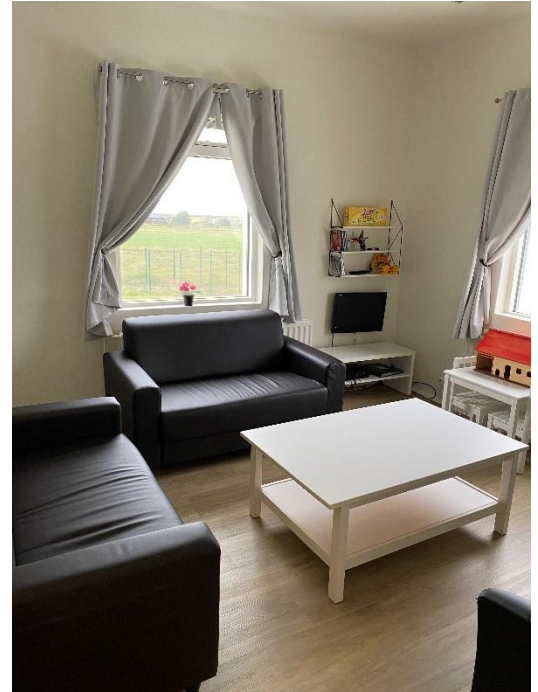
In an inquiry sent to the Icelandic PPO, they were asked what the reasons were for, firstly, the closing of the children's cottage during the weekends. Secondly, why are the amenities and social support for children with incarcerated parents as poor as it is relative to the Nordic countries? Third, if any improvements of the poor conditions were on the horizon? The PPO's answer was similar to prior answers on the issue, that the funding from the government does not allow them to allocate more funds to the problem due to austerity measures. This is, however, not exclusive to the last few years. Reports ranging from over ten years ago suggest that the government has neglected children's issues in prisons (Ruv, 2010). The way in which the government's narrative centres around children who have incarcerated parents is relevant to Zelizer's concept of the *worth of children*. In a period of economic hardship, children are seen as a burden by authorities, instead of future investment, as is the case in a period of economic prosperity (Zelizer, 1985). When asked about what improvements in social support and amenities the interlocutors would like to see, Jón reflected upon the value of his children.

“A lot of the things that are needed for the children do not have to cost a lot of money. Some more toys here (in kviábryggja) to play with in the sandbox, buy a couple of plastic sledges to use on the hillside, some toys. We’re talking about a few hundred crowns here (1 euro is around 150 Icelandic crowns). You can’t tell me that the state can’t afford a few plastic sledges and some toys... They’re looked at like they’re in the way.”

Jón feels as though the position of his children, and children of prisoners in general, are looked at as though they are in the way their real purpose, but not a social fact of the situation at hand. Although the economic crisis of 2008 has long since passed, some austerity measures have yet to be reversed. Zelizer noted that in a financial state of hardship, children tend to be viewed as dependants rather than citizens with rights and agency (Zelizer, 1985).

Subsequently, issues regarding children, typically education and welfare for children, are reduced (Zelizer, 1985). In a world controlled by adults, it can prove to be an onerous task for children to fight for their rights (Punch, 2002). According to Zelizer, the needs of adults are prioritised as they are seen to retain more economic value than children. This can lead to children’s needs and concerns being neglected by authorities. Moreover, the restrictive financial measures of authorities towards children can negatively impact their well-being (Zelizer, 1985). As noted by Bandelj and Spiegel (2022), the “*useful-to-be child*” is a child seen as an investment for the future. This does not seem to apply in case of children who are impacted by parental incarceration. Sufficed to say, Zelizer’s concept of the worth of children relative to economic hardship is highly applicable to the Icelandic carceral setting. Parents believe that their children are not valued to the extent that they should be, to the extent that the Icelandic PPO does not seem to receive enough funding to buy relevant toys for some of the prisons.

To summarise this chapter, the policy changes parents would like to implement for their children were explored. Parents desired changes in policy concern are grounded in three key elements. Firstly, keeping the child’s innocence is paramount. This view is grounded in that



Picture 4. This is the family visiting room in Litla-Hraun. The facility lacks an outdoor area, and parents find the room unusable due to disruptive sounds of intimate activities emanating from adjacent conjugal visiting rooms along the same hallway.

any action which concerns the prison and children's visiting, should be centred around keeping the child's innocence. This is for example, refraining from searching in most circumstances in an effort not to make the children feel like suspects and constructing a child-friendly experience. This correlates with scholars' view of children's visits, emphasising the need to break down any barrier that could lead to the child's decreased interest in visiting their parents in prison (Rubenstein, Toman & Cochran, 2022). Secondly, policy should always be self-reflective, critical towards itself and question whether the parent's punishment is more important than the child's well-being. The interviewed parents discuss the true meaning of incarceration and challenge its ways. They do this by suggesting that the needs of children should come first. Suggestions such as allowing incarcerated parents to spend more time at home with their children, allocating more time at the children's cottage as it provides parents with a more respectful environment for their children and negates the need to take the children out of school to to utilise the children's cottage. Parents feel as though their children experience punishment because of their incarceration and note that changes in many aspects is neither difficult in the practical sense nor the economic sense. The third factor concerns the re-evaluation of children as human capital. As it stands, parents express that many of the factors concerning their children's wellbeing is grounded in the authority's neglect of their value and that rather than the authorities and the Icelandic PPO looking at them as a collateral investment, they are looked at as being "*in the way*".

6. Conclusions

The purpose of this thesis was to demonstrate the characteristics of parental incarceration in Iceland, how it affects the children and what aspects parents who experience parental incarceration would like to see changed. Children who have incarcerated parents have often been called the silent or invisible victims of incarceration, as their personal plights following their parent's incarceration have traditionally not been monitored nor gathered the attention they deserved. In Iceland, the lack of social and academic awareness towards children who have incarcerated parents led the Ombudsman of Children in Iceland to push for a report about the subject. I wrote this report, as has been mentioned, and this thesis can be considered as an extension of that report in some ways. The main difference being additional interlocutors as well as the thesis being grounded in theory, rather than solely demonstrating

conditions as done in the report. The results are based on data gathered from nine interviews with currently imprisoned individuals from the open prisons of Sogn and Kvíabryggja who have also been incarcerated in closed prisons as well as an interview with a family member of an incarcerated individual. Adding to that, visual data reaffirms the collected data from the interviews. Children were not included in the data collection as has been mentioned before, due to ethical concerns and time restraints, however, as the results demonstrate, familiar issues concerning parental incarceration are to be found inside the Icelandic penal system. The results from this study suggest that authorities have neglected children who have incarcerated parents in Iceland. Literature on the topic of parental incarceration notes that children who experience parental incarceration are in increased danger of anti-social behavioural patterns as well as the increased risk of mental health issues (Besemer et al., 2019).

The findings demonstrated in the results chapter outline the characteristics of parental incarceration according to the parents, how stigmatisation influences the children as well as the parents and what policy changes the parents would like to see regarding parental incarceration.

Interviewees highlight the absence of a systematic approach or safety net to support children affected by parental incarceration. This issue concerns parents, as parental incarceration significantly disrupts the traditional family structure. Unlike the Nordic countries where specialised organisations aid such children, Iceland lacks such resources. These organisations play a crucial role in offering assistance and post-incarceration support to affected children. Wallis and Dennison (2015) observe that instead of providing centralised support, authorities often overlook their role in destabilising families, leaving parents to cope with the aftermath of parental incarceration on their own.

Geographical distance also influences family visits. While some incarcerated individuals may be relatively close to their families, others face challenges that prevent children from meeting their parents as often as they ideally should.

The amenities provided to children with incarcerated parents can lead to feelings of disrespect for both the children and their parents. The scarcity of designated visiting areas in open prisons raises parental concerns about interactions with other inmates. On the other hand, Litla-Hraun offers the "children's cottage," a small, worn container with evident

flaws. Despite these flaws, it provides users with a sense of peace and tranquillity, a notable contrast to the lacking atmosphere in the prison's visiting area.

Stigmatisation is a significant issue for children impacted by parental incarceration. Interviewees reveal various strategies they and their children adopt to manage this stigma. Some conceal their stigmatised status, often to shield their children from secondary stigma. Others empower themselves and their children by embracing their stigmatised identity.

The study's crucial aspect was to explore changes that parents experiencing parental incarceration wish to see for their children. The respondents assert that the existing facilities and amenities often don't cater to the innocent nature of children. For instance, interviewees report instances of hearing sexual activities in adjacent rooms during visits with their children. Parents also express scepticism about the necessity of body searches, especially for children, arguing that such measures are ineffective at preventing drugs from entering prisons. This perspective aligns with radical approaches to imprisonment, echoing views from Rubenstein, Toman, and Cochran (2022), who suggest that any restrictive measures can influence a child's willingness to visit a parent in prison.

Unsurprisingly, individuals who undergo parental incarceration are highly critical of its operation. They point out that maintaining previously positive relationships with their children becomes challenging due to the difficult circumstances. A standard critique of the penal system is its neglect of children's needs due to their lack of representation. Parents express that their children's emotional well-being is not taken into consideration, making them feel punished despite their innocence. Additionally, austerity measures have substantially impacted the quality of facilities and support available to children affected by parental incarceration. Punch (2002) emphasises that children's needs are often disregarded in an adult-dominated world, and Zelizer (1985) notes that economic hardships often lead to viewing children as dependents rather than potential investments.

In conclusion, children experiencing parental incarceration require increased support and improved facilities. These children's voices and needs have been frequently ignored, as is often the case. Over the years, the Icelandic government has neglected its role in parental incarceration, leading to significant suffering among affected children. Scholars have

identified multiple negative factors related to parental incarceration's impact on children. Consequently, policies should be designed to address these adverse effects. The Nordic countries have established multiple measures to assist children in such challenging circumstances, serving as a model for Icelandic authorities to emulate. This proactive approach would enhance conditions and reduce the detrimental aspects of parental incarceration.

Suggestions for Future Research

As the topic of parental incarceration and how it concerns children has yet to be studied extensively in Iceland, there is a dire need for more research examining the many issues that follow the subject. This study has provided a view into many aspects of parental incarceration. Still, as the children it affects were not included in the study, it is paramount that further research includes children in the process. Saunders, McArthur & Moore (2015) mention that excluding children from research on them denies the children's lived experiences to be recounted directly and subsequently better acted upon and future research should bear that in mind.

Fortunately, the number of people who are incarcerated or are children of incarcerated individuals is not great. This poses a challenge for any researcher on the subject as finding interlocutors, as was the case for me, can be difficult. Additionally, further researchers should also be granted access to individuals incarcerated in the closed prisons of Iceland as it firstly, contains more individuals and secondly, could possibly provide a more direct report of the conditions.

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