

Study reveals children are the collateral damage of the justice system

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They are called the "orphans of justice"- the children of parents who are imprisoned. There is no record of how many children are impacted when their primary carer goes to jail – and this "invisible" cohort is increasing with evidence that around 5% of all Australian children will experience parental incarceration in their lifetime.

A landmark study, led by Monash researchers, has investigated what happens to the [children](#) when their primary carer is incarcerated. The study looked at 151 imprisoned carers in Victoria and New South Wales.

The study, called *The Impact of Incarceration on Children's Care: A Strategic Framework for Good Care Planning* by the Monash University Criminal Justice Research Consortium, was done in recognition that the number of [parents](#) being imprisoned is increasing – affecting an increasing number of children.

The study found that "there are key crisis points during a parent's journey through the criminal justice system – arrest, remand, sentencing, imprisonment and release – with little formal attention paid to children at each of these stages."

Children most affected by parental incarceration are typically primary school aged and most are required to move from their family home when their primary carer is incarcerated. There is no specific followup or support for the children and, while mothers are offered a range of parenting supports and services while in [jail](#), fathers are "offered very little support...and are arguably less prepared when returning to a parenting role in the community," the study said.

Primary data was obtained from the carers as well as 27 additional carers, three children and two adult children and 124 professional stakeholders.

According to lead author, Dr Catherine Flynn, from the Monash Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, "we know little about what actually happens to children when their primary carer is taken into prison: the processes which respond to them, their trajectory of care, or how crises and transitions are managed," she said.

Provided by Monash University

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