Kids on the Outside: Policy Options for Youth with Incarcerated Parents in British Columbia.

by

Linda Mussell

B.A. (Political Science), Simon Fraser University, 2010

Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Public Policy

In the School of Public Policy Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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Name: Linda Mussell
Degree: Master of Public Policy
Title: *Kids on the Outside: Policy Options for Youth with Incarcerated Parents in British Columbia.*

Examining Committee:

**Chair:** Nancy Olewiler  
Professor, School of Public Policy, SFU

**Olena Hankivsky**  
Senior Supervisor  
Professor

**Doug McArthur**  
Supervisor  
Professor

**Maureen Maloney**  
Internal Examiner  
Professor

Date Defended/Approved: March 9, 2016
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Abstract

The United Nations, non-profit organizations, and research communities have identified youth with incarcerated parents as a distinct and vulnerable population requiring tailored policy response. This research study examined the situation in British Columbia, and focused on how to foster resilience in this population rather than only examining damaging effects of having incarcerated parents. The study drew on academic and grey literature and key expert interviews to identify policy options. Importantly, the study also presents insights into advancing research in the field, specifically what is required when working with youth in the future. As a result of preliminary research, four policy options are presented: an integrated approach, education-centred supports, corrections-centred supports, and a justice-centred option. The policy options recommended are intended to support the resilience, life outcomes, and well-being of youth with incarcerated parents, and feature youth engagement in decision-making, and integrating data collection and sharing to inform evidence-based service provision.

Keywords: Children and Youth; Incarcerated Parents; Policy Analysis; Resilience; Positive Youth Development; British Columbia
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACCW</td>
<td>Alouette Correctional Centre for Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AI</td>
<td>Amnesty International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>British Columbia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCRC</td>
<td>Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children</td>
</tr>
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<td>CFCS</td>
<td>Child, Family and Community Service Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFCN</td>
<td>Canadian Families and Corrections Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPIR</td>
<td>Child Protection Investigation Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRC</td>
<td>Convention on the Rights of the Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSC</td>
<td>Correctional Service of Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CYPCS</td>
<td>Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAA</td>
<td>Delegated Aboriginal Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DGD</td>
<td>Day of General Discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOC-WA</td>
<td>Department of Corrections Washington State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFry</td>
<td>Elizabeth Fry Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>FBCYICN</td>
<td>Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks</td>
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<tr>
<td>FDR</td>
<td>Family Development Response</td>
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<tr>
<td>FOSA</td>
<td>Family and Offender Sentencing Alternative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gov BC</td>
<td>Government of British Columbia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRW</td>
<td>Human Rights Watch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCFD</td>
<td>Ministry of Children and Family Development (British Columbia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCP</td>
<td>Mother-Child Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoJ</td>
<td>Ministry of Justice (British Columbia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NFP</td>
<td>Nurse Family Partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCHR</td>
<td>Office of the Commissioner on Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OIA</td>
<td>Offender Intake Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>PHO</td>
<td>Public Health Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>PFV</td>
<td>Private Family Visiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>Penal Reform International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PYD</td>
<td>Positive Youth Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Name</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>UBCIC</td>
<td>Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UFV</td>
<td>University of the Fraser Valley</td>
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<tr>
<td>RYCBC</td>
<td>Representative for Youth and Children British Columbia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFU</td>
<td>Simon Fraser University</td>
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<tr>
<td>SUPERU</td>
<td>Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPAR</td>
<td>Youth Participatory Action Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Glossary</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adversity</strong></td>
<td>Experiences that threaten a person’s adaptation or development (Wright, Masten, &amp; Narayan, 2013).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ambiguous loss</strong></td>
<td>The loss a person feels when a family member is physically present but psychologically absent, or vice versa (Johnson &amp; Easterling, 2015).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attachment Theory</strong></td>
<td>Disruptions or separations in the parent-child relationship increase risk for children and damage the ability to form secure relationships (Dallaire, 2007).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Buffering Factor</strong></td>
<td>Social support can act as a buffer and protect a person from stressful situations (Luther, 2015).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Caregiver</strong></td>
<td>A child placed with a caregiver, e.g., a foster parent, who assumes responsibility for the child’s care (RCYBC, 2013).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cascading effect</strong></td>
<td>Cascading effects enhance multiple areas of functioning and deter negative effects (Wright, Masten, &amp; Narayan, 2013).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child, Family and Community Service Act</strong></td>
<td>Legislation passed in 1996 governing child protection in British Columbia (RCYBC, 2013).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child of Incarcerated Parent(s)</strong></td>
<td>Children of parents with prior or current custody in a federal prison or provincial jail, or detention in a facility for reason such as awaiting trial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Custodial sentence</strong></td>
<td>Mandatory custody of an offender in a closed institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Delinquency</strong></td>
<td>Anti-social or illegal behaviour by young people, e.g., theft or physical altercation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Desensitization</strong></td>
<td>A person’s emotive response may become less intense over time or with repetition (Johnson &amp; Easterling, 2015).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ecological Perspective</strong></td>
<td>A lens to understand the set of circumstances associated with having incarcerated parents, focusing on the people in children’s environments (Blumberg &amp; Griffin, 2013).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exosystem factor</strong></td>
<td>Factors indirectly influencing child wellbeing such as policy and government supports (Poelmann et al., 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Heterogeneous treatment</strong></td>
<td>The theory that parental incarceration affects children in different ways (Turney &amp; Wildeman, 2015).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intersectionality</strong></td>
<td>Factors such as gender, race, and ethnicity interact with parental incarceration, producing multiplicative impacts among some people (Foster &amp; Hagan, 2015).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Justice-involvement</strong></td>
<td>An umbrella term referring to a range of contact with the justice system, all of which may affect children; this study focuses solely on parental separation due to custody or detention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lean initiative</strong></td>
<td>Principles, methods, and tools to improve the speed and efficiency of government processes (Gov. of BC., 2013).</td>
</tr>
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<td>---------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Macrosystem factors</strong></td>
<td>Structural factors influencing child relationships and wellbeing, e.g., social attitudes to imprisonment (Poelmann et al., 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mesosystem factors</strong></td>
<td>Social connections that occur across microsystems, e.g., a parent-caregiver relationship (Poelmann et al., 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Microsystem factors</strong></td>
<td>Relationships take place in multiple “microsystem” relationship settings, e.g., home with family (Poelmann et al., 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Permanency</strong></td>
<td>Maximizing long-term family, community, and cultural connectedness and stability among children (MCFD, 2012).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Youth Development</strong></td>
<td>An umbrella term for development approaches that are strengths-based, involve multiple agents, focus on relationships, and facilitate positive development in everyday tasks (Sesma, Mannes, &amp; Scales, 2013).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary control strategies</strong></td>
<td>Strategies to mitigate a stressor or accompanying emotions (Johnson &amp; Easterling, 2015).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Protective factor</strong></td>
<td>Factors that moderate the impact of adversity and facilitate adaptation (Wright, Masten, &amp; Narayan, 2013).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secondary control strategies</strong></td>
<td>Strategies that maximize adaptation to uncontrollable situations (Johnson &amp; Easterling, 2015).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stigma</strong></td>
<td>A set of negative and often unfair beliefs that a group or society have about a phenomenon (“Stigma”, n.d.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stigmatization</strong></td>
<td>A process of propagating discrimination, which involves labelling differences, linking labels with negative qualities, using “us” and “them” terms, and devaluing labelled persons (Phillips &amp; Gates, 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stressor</strong></td>
<td>An external factor causing emotional stress to an individual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Threat</strong></td>
<td>A likelihood that adverse outcomes will happen, which negatively affect the wellbeing of the child (Vine, Hall, &amp; Gardner, 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resilience</strong></td>
<td>Positive adaptation to risk, threat, or adversity. A process where a person uses internal and external resources (e.g., the support of others and society) to navigate, withstand, and heal (Vine, Hall &amp; Gardner, 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Risk factor</strong></td>
<td>Increased probability of a negative outcome, synonymous with threat, and the antonym of a protective factor (Wright, Masten, &amp; Narayan, 2013).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Significant adult</strong></td>
<td>An adult who engages in a caring, supportive, and long-term relationship with a child/youth (RCYBC, 2013).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strengths-based approach</strong></td>
<td>An approach that acknowledges the strengths that children develop and use to adapt to challenges (Crenshaw, 2013).</td>
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<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Turning point</strong></td>
<td>A positive shift in life path in a context of adversity (Kopak &amp; Smith-Ruiz, 2015).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type I trauma</strong></td>
<td>Exposure to a single traumatic event (Crenshaw, 2013).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type II trauma</strong></td>
<td>Exposure to repeated or prolonged trauma (Crenshaw, 2013).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visitation</strong></td>
<td>The experience or opportunity for children to visit parents who are in provincial or federal custody.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vulnerability</strong></td>
<td>A person’s susceptibility to negative outcomes (Wright, Masten, &amp; Narayan, 2013), an antonym to resiliency (Kaplan, 2013).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth in care</strong></td>
<td>Youth in the custody, care, or guardianship of the government, with responsibility delegated to a child welfare worker (RCYBC, 2013).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Executive Summary

Policy Problem

Youth with incarcerated parents are a hidden population at all jurisdictional levels. Indeed, little is known about the experiences of minors under the age of 19 with incarcerated parents, despite the distinct nature of this form of parental separation (Cunningham & Baker, 2003). Academics, international organizations, and non-profits have all noted that more research and policy action is required to mitigate the potential risk of adversity and negative outcomes for this population (Bayes, 2007; McCormick, Millar, & Paddock, 2014; United Nations, 2011). This research begins to address these gaps by exploring the experiences of youth with incarcerated parents in British Columbia (BC) through background research and key expert insights, and by offering policy recommendations to better support impacted youth. Resilience is the explicit focus, and this study furthers a preventative approach through supports, services and overall policy to assist vulnerable youth, instead of merely focusing on the symptoms of incarceration.

Background

International organizations including the United Nations (UN), Penal Reform International (PRI), Amnesty International (AI), and Human Rights Watch (HRW) acknowledge children of incarcerated parents as a vulnerable population facing serious challenges (AI, 2011; HRW, 2011; PRI, 2015; UN Human Rights Council, 2013). It is unknown exactly how many children with incarcerated parents live in Canada, but non-profits who work with this population estimate that the number is approximately 180,000 to 350,000 youth under the age of 19 (CFCN et al., 2013; personal interview), a significant portion of the population in that age range.

Challenges for impacted children include stigma, housing instability, poverty, difficulty of maintaining a relationship with parents, struggling in school, and increased likelihood of intergenerational incarceration (McCormick et al., 2014). BC was selected as the area of focus for this study due to the researcher’s connection with the policy problem in this jurisdiction (see Appendix J). A limited number of programs operate in Canada for minors with incarcerated parents, including in-prison visitation and remote
communications. There is paucity of data on the topic of parental incarceration and resilience in children (e.g., Bocknek, Sanderson & Britner, 2009; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008), and little knowledge on the topic within Canada. While it is unclear what the specific and unique needs of this population are, based on limited knowledge the existing public policies and program provision are insufficient to meet the needs of this group.

Policy Options

This capstone presents four policy options containing a variety of facets, and drawing upon direction from expert interviews and background research. The first is an integrated approach including sub-options of increasing youth empowerment through consultation and engagement, integrating information collection and sharing protocols, ensuring child rights advocacy at the national and provincial levels, and supporting the economic and social wellbeing of families. The second portfolio consists of education-centred supports such as supporting youth peer-mentoring programs, and providing training for educational staff. The third option is a correction-centred approach which includes enhancing parent-child visitation environment and programs, and improving parent-child communications service provision. The last option is justice-centred and focuses on accounting for the impact of incarceration on children during parental sentencing. All options demonstrate merit in supporting the wellbeing and life outcomes of impacted youth, and all are recommended and grouped as short-term, intermediate, or long-term interventions.

Methodology

This capstone provides background information on programs, incarceration trends, and policy, as well as primary data collected through ten semi-structured phone interviews with professionals who are decision-makers, or advocate, research, and work with youth of incarcerated parents. Prior research featuring professional experts with a range of roles in the field was not available in Canada on this topic. Interview data is thematically analyzed, and informs the range of policy options and considerations for analysis. A constructionist methodology promotes interactive conversations between the interviewer and participants with the aim of developing understandings on experiences, challenges, strengths, and solutions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). An ecological lens guides a holistic
consideration of children’s networks, policy context, and societal views (Blumberg & Griffin, 2013).

The study also sought to feature in-person, semi-structured interviews with youth ages 14 to 18, facilitated with the support of Ministry of Youth and Family Development (MCFD), and Elizabeth Fry Society (EFry) of Greater Vancouver. The original motivation was to invite youth with currently or formerly incarcerated parents to have a voice in policy research, and input in policy recommendations. However, the time frame for the current research project did not allow for this to be realized. Specifically, it was found that greater relationship and trust building is necessary before asking youth to share in an interview, especially since members of this population may experience a great amount of stigma. There is still a pressing need to include youth directly in research in this area, and this study provides insights into how this can be achieved in the future.

**Interview Findings**

Thematic analysis of interview findings yielded key themes that are used to guide policy options and analysis in this capstone. Findings confirmed the typology of challenges presented in prior BC literature (e.g., McCormick et al., 2014), and also extend to previously unexamined dimensions of resilience. These include challenges associated with multiple sentences; specifically, multiple sentences over time (and provincial sentences) may be more disruptive to the lives of youth than one long separation. Stigma and social isolation challenges are additional themes, and especially problematic for youth (more so than younger children) who are at a key stage in forming identity. Experts emphasize the importance of parental contact and family supports above interventions focusing on the youth in isolation to promote resilience. Policy suggestions to support child wellbeing include strengthening protective factors of adult-child bonds through visitation, communication, parent training, mentoring, and family support, as well as integrating service provision and improving data collection.

**Policy Assessment**

This capstone assesses a collection of policy options on the efficacy of each in achieving societal objectives associated with promoting the wellbeing of children with incarcerated parents featuring elements of a Youth Positive Development Framework.
(PYD) (Sesma et al., 2013). Assessment criteria include: (1) youth development, (2) equity and fairness, (3) participation and consultation, (4) protection and security, (5) government efficiency, and (6) stakeholder response. Policy options do not emerge from analysis as singularly persuasive (e.g., one option better than the others), rather what is concluded is that all serve an important part of an integrated, coordinated, and holistic approach to the care and support of impacted youth.

**Recommendations**

Recommendations emerging from policy analysis are divided into short-term, intermediate, and long-term options. Short-term options are proposed as primary steps that are necessary for policy that is evidence-based and inclusive of the voice and experiences of impacted youth. These steps include providing opportunity for youth engagement in decision-making, and integrating data collection and sharing to inform evidence-based service provision. Intermediate options are envisioned for implementation after short-term options are successfully established and maintained. Long-term options are important systemic changes that BC requires for the wellbeing of impacted children.

**Conclusion**

The government has a duty to better support youth with incarcerated parents in BC. Support is required as per the UN Convention on The Rights of the Child (CRC), and more importantly because it is the normatively just pathway forward. It is a societal responsibility to support children experiencing adverse impacts from the justice system and culture of incarceration. As one researcher states: “Society has a stake in understanding the emotional, psychological, social and economic experiences of children and youth who grow into adulthood and take responsibility for careers, families, and lifestyles of their own” (Allard, 2012, p. 51). Recommendations that emerge in the policy analysis of this capstone are primary pathways to meeting that societal responsibility.
Chapter 1. Introduction

Policy Problem

There is paucity of policy attention regarding youth under the age of 19 with incarcerated parents, and little knowledge is available on experiences of this population. This policy and knowledge gap exists internationally, nationally, and provincially. A better understanding of youth shared challenges and needs is required, as well as strengths and resiliency, to determine the extent available policies are helpful, and where to direct future policy attention. International organizations, academics, and non-profit organizations identify that this group strongly warrants public policy attention and action. This capstone responds to the knowledge gap by examining expert insights and analysing policy options to provide enhanced support. It also presents a methodology for how to work with youth of incarcerated parents to inform future policy development. This study seeks to answer: how can governments support the resiliency, wellbeing, and life outcomes of youth with incarcerated parents in BC? Resilience is of particular focus, and this study furthers a preventative approach to assisting vulnerable youth, instead of merely focusing on the symptoms of incarceration.

Problem Scope

Non-profit organizations estimate that there are approximately 180,000 to 350,000 impacted children with incarcerated parents in Canada (CFCN et al., 2013; personal interview), and that parental incarceration is a distinct form of parental separation (Bayes, 2007). This capstone strives to understand the experiences of youth with incarcerated parents in BC. It is a preliminary study of one jurisdiction as a step towards addressing the knowledge gap in Canada. BC was selected due to the researcher’s relationships in the field and connection to the policy issue (see Appendix J). The youth in question are legal minors (under the age of 19), who reside in the province of BC, and have parents (mothers and/or fathers) with a history of incarceration. Particular consideration is given to teenagers (“youth”) who tend to receive less attention in the literature. “Incarcerated parents” in this study refers to individuals with prior or current custody in a federal prison or provincial jail, or detention in a facility for reason such as awaiting trial. Justice-involvement is an umbrella term that refers to a range of contact with the justice system,
all of which may affect children; this study focuses solely on parental separation due to custody or detention.

**British Columbian Research Gap**

McCormick et al.’s 2014 report from the University of the Fraser Valley (UFV) is among the first in BC to provide an overview of local children of incarcerated parents, and illuminates the rationale for research in this jurisdiction. The report presents a literature review and incorporates the insights of an expert panel held in 2013 (McCormick et al., 2014). It identifies substantial knowledge gaps in provincial and federal policy, services, and data collection. McCormick et al. (2014) provide a profile of children with incarcerated parents in BC, including compromised child welfare, developmental challenges, and disrupted relationships with parents (McCormick et al., 2014). Additional challenges include difficulty in school, negative effects of stigma, and risk for intergenerational incarceration. The authors identify children with incarcerated mothers as especially at-risk from a developmental perspective (McCormick et al., 2014) which is especially important given the large geographic separation between children and incarcerated mothers in BC. The authors conclude that more research is required to understand the needs, experiences, and potential policy and program responses to best respond to this at-risk population (McCormick et al., 2014).

**Research Purpose**

Few studies have focused on protective factors that shield children from challenges associated with parental incarceration (Dallaire & Zeman, 2013). Further, few studies have sought the insights of experts from a range of positions in the field through interviews. This study builds new knowledge through analysis of interview data with experts with the intent of benefiting impacted youth, as well as the child welfare, voluntary, and academic communities. The original purpose was also to conduct interviews with youth of incarcerated parents who are ages 14 to 18; however, this is now envisioned as future research. Throughout the study the goal was to identify, analyze and recommend policy solutions using a strengths-based approach, which identifies that youth adapt existing behaviours into strengths to navigate challenges (MCFD, 2010). The goal of this research is to focus on supports, services and overall policy to advance youth wellbeing,
and in particular resilience. Study results may also have applicability and generalizability to other jurisdictions seeking to assist this population.

**Theoretical Grounding**

This is an interdisciplinary study drawing from academic disciplines of public policy, sociology, law, psychology, criminology, and child/youth studies. It presents solutions, which touch on multiple provincial sectors including corrections, justice, health, education, and child welfare. An overarching constructionist paradigm informs the design and analysis of the study. This capstone takes a critical stance to taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world (Burr, 2003), and seeks to build understanding between the persons involved in the interviews regarding how to best support youth of incarcerated parents (Morgan, 2007). In interviews with experts, the interviewer and participants interactively developed understandings about the policy issue and policy opinions, and were cognisant of the many protective and risk factors present in child environments.

This study uses an ecological lens, seeking to understand the complex range of issues, circumstances, threats, and protective factors that are associated with the experience of having incarcerated parents (Blumberg & Griffin, 2013). An ecological lens is inclusive of children’s social networks, the policy context, and societal perspectives (Blumberg & Griffin, 2013). This lens focuses on children’s proximal interactions with socializing adults in micro-environments (e.g., home, school), and connections between environments (meso-environments). Children with enriched environments have access to supportive adults who support healthy development (Dallaire, Ciccone, & Wilson, 2009).

Policy options follow a Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework, focusing on human strengths to build ability and resilience, involving multiple agencies, focusing on relationships, and seeking to improve youth’s wellbeing (Sesma et al., 2013). This research accounts for multiple aspects present in children’s environments, and encompasses different elements that can be enhanced or revised to assist them better. This goes hand in hand with a focus on resilience, since resilience denotes that relationships between youth and environments have significance, and that all youth have the ability to adapt to environmental threats (Lerner et al., 2013). The aim is to identify the most promising policy options to advance youth wellbeing, and in particular resilience.
Chapter 2. Literature Review

Overview

The majority of research conducted on this topic focuses on the experiences and presence of negative factors affecting American children of incarcerated parents. This is due to the greater rate of incarceration in the United States, and visibility of the effects of incarceration on families (Beck, 2000). While American literature is relevant due to cultural and legal similarities when examining the issue in BC, there is still a lack of domestic literature to consult (McCormick et al., 2014). Some literature is available from other jurisdictions including the UK, Australia, the Netherlands, and Belgium (e.g., Burgess & Flynn, 2013; Hissel, Bijleveld & Kruttschnitt, 2011; Loureiro, 2010).

This literature review highlights the debates on the topic of children with incarcerated parents by focusing on themes of resiliency and challenges, and identifying knowledge gaps for further exploration. Few studies explicitly focus on protective factors and resiliency, and most focus on the symptoms of parental incarceration. Throughout this discussion it is important to keep in mind that children experience parental incarceration heterogeneously (Turney & Wildeman, 2015), and may have multiple identities, privileges, and oppressions which also shape their experience.

Definitions: Protective Factors and Resilience

Protective factors mitigate the effects of risk or threat (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). A threat is elevated likelihood of adverse outcomes, disrupting a child’s functioning, development, and ability to thrive (Vine et al., 2010). Three types of protective factors are recurrent in the discipline of psychology: individual dispositional attitudes (e.g., confidence, empathy), socialization encouraging trust and connections (e.g., close relationships with adults), and external community support systems (e.g., clubs/teams) (Goldstein & Brooks, 2013). Resilience is closely associated with protective factors; it is a dynamic process where an individual uses internal (e.g., personal attributes) and external resources (e.g., relationships) to successfully navigate a threat (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000; Vine, Hall & Gardner, 2010).
Resilience Among Children of Incarcerated Parents

The majority of the literature focuses on challenges, threats, and adverse outcomes, the symptoms experienced by children of incarcerated parents, instead of proactive interventions and protective factors present in the lives of children such as resilience. The study of resilience only emerged in the last 50 years, and the prior (and lingering) focus has been directed to understanding pathology and deficits, rather than prevention and resolution of problems (Crenshaw, 2013; Wright, Masten, & Narayan, 2013). While challenges and symptoms are important to understand as part of the issue, it is also crucial to devote equal or more attention to capacity for resilience and the strengths of children with incarcerated parents.

Resilience is a quality individuals develop through a pattern of repeatedly encountering threats, and forming positive adaptive responses (Vine et al., 2013). It is not an innate trait that a person is born with, rather it references evidence of positive adaptation (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000; Vine et al., 2013). Each person has the innate capacity to respond well to adversity, it is the ability to respond well that society must foster and develop in children (Vine et al., 2013).

Crenshaw (2013) states: “recognizing and honoring resilience in children offers far more leverage for change” (p. 313). Similarly, Luther (2015) notes that focusing primarily on risks and negative outcomes limits space to advance policies that contribute to constructive outcomes. Focusing on fixing deficits is not as effective as giving at least equal weight to building assets (Goldstein & Brooks, 2013). Adalist-Estrin (2006) notes that discovering children’s strengths, and what builds strengths indicates the best policy solutions to pursue. For example, academic support programs foster resilience by building child confidence and competence, with lasting life impacts (Adalist-Estrin, 2006).

In discussing resilience among children of incarcerated parents, protective qualities, factors, and coping strategies are important to understand. When viewing protective factors with an ecological systems lens, a crucial factor is child interaction with socializing adults in the environments they move through (Dallaire et al., 2009). For example, Akesson et al. (2012) note that within the school environment, possessing high self-esteem and a sense of achievement is one set of protective factors. A second set of
factors include strong adult-child relationships, and extended social networks to help children adapt positively (Akesson et al., 2012). Similarly, Luther (2015) discusses that the presence of a caring adult is an instrumental protective factor for children.

Furthermore, resiliency manifests in the form of coping strategies that service providers can harness to better support children (Dawson, Jackson, & Nyamanthi, 2012). Coping strategies include working hard and taking responsibility (Beck & Jones, 2007), focusing on school and social activities (Beck & Jones, 2007; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008), and thinking of a better future (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2011; Schlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). Luther (2015) explains that resilience happens through turning points; the transition of children to more resilient trajectories. Turning points relate to child action, relation, and reflection, and connection to adult social support (Luther, 2015). Luther’s (2015) qualitative study of adult former children of incarcerated parents found that supportive adults provided key social support to participants, by facilitating access to activities, supplying resources, supporting hope, and encouraging turning points.

Resilience means achieving context dependent positive developmental outcomes (e.g., mental wellness, healthy relationships, graduating high school) and avoiding maladaptive alternatives (Goldstein & Brooks, 2013; Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). It is the upshot of providing children with opportunities to develop the skills needed to persevere in situations of threat or adversity (Goldstein & Brooks, 2013).

**Canadian Literature**

In Canada, only one exploratory report presents direct interviews with children of incarcerated parents (i.e., Cunningham & Baker, 2003). The study emphasizes how destabilization results from the factor of parental incarceration interacting with pre-existing vulnerability (Cunningham & Baker, 2003). A total of 6 children (ages 5 to 12) and 1 adolescent describe their feelings and experiences relating to maternal incarceration, and interview data is presented as short case studies. Cunningham and Baker’s (2003) study found that separation triggered by maternal incarceration is distinctly destabilizing, exacerbated by pre-existing challenges, and produces increased vulnerability for criminal behaviour. It briefly notes that the absence of buffering factors put a child at-risk (Cunningham & Baker, 2003). The authors identify potential solutions such as finding ways
for meaningful contact, providing training programs for professionals, and parenting programs for incarcerated mothers (Cunningham & Baker, 2003). There is opportunity for further exploration of youth experiences through interviews, as well as analysing data in greater depth, discussing resilience, and linking interviews with policy solutions.

**Challenges Associated with Parental Incarceration**

**A Unique Separation**

Incarceration is a distinct form of parental separation (Rodriguez & Margolin, 2015). Local literature identifies that labels hide children of incarcerated parents by placing them in broader typologies (Bayes, 2007), such as being in care and impoverished. Cunningham and Baker (2003) discuss how parental separation triggered by incarceration is distinct from other forms of parental separation, as it renders children more likely to face conditions such as poverty, multiple school and home changes, and stigma that may prevent them from accessing support (Cunningham & Baker, 2003). In American literature, Allard (2012) presents findings indicating that parental incarceration interferes with a child’s sense of stability and security. Children may become preoccupied with family disintegration, parental wellbeing, the ability to reconnect with parents, and home instability, all which impact academic performance and behaviour (Allard, 2012).

School systems, caregivers, family, and society tend to legitimize children’s grieving processes due to other forms of parental separation, but less so for reason of incarceration (Allard, 2012). There is less understanding of the trauma children experience resulting from the loss of a parent due to incarceration (Allard, 2012). Allard (2012) notes that children experience stigma of low expectations and assumptions of failure. Adalist-Estrin (2006) interviewed youth and families who report that others withdraw, deem them as a guilty proxy, or question their feelings. Children may feel that no one trusts them, and experience shame or fear of social labeling (Adalist-Estrin, 2006; Allard 2012; Hairston, 2007). Nesmith and Ruhland (2008) note in interviews with children that they may seek to obscure or conceal their lived reality from others.

Stigma can be localized among family members or manifest in peer hostility and rejection (Manby et al., 2015). Dallaire, Ciccone, and Wilson (2009) present a powerful example of stigma in a survey of teachers in Virginia. The authors identify teachers as a
source of stigmatization and lowered expectations of students. Teachers report witnessing colleagues being unsupportive, unprofessional, and expecting less from children with incarcerated parents (Dallaire et al., 2009). The authors find that knowledge of parental incarceration shapes judgments that teachers form about students and home environments, and impacts academic expectations (Dallaire et al., 2009).

**Socioeconomic and Aboriginal Status**

Incarceration affects families heterogeneously; children in families that are oppressed due to other factors may face additional challenges when a primary caregiver is incarcerated (Foster & Hagan, 2015; Turney & Wildeman, 2015). Most notably, Aboriginal individuals are over-represented in the Canadian criminal justice system and Aboriginal children are disproportionately affected (Bennett, 2015). Corrado and Cohen (2011) examine 2006 census data on Aboriginal youth in Canada, and note the centrality of education, housing, mobility, employment, and language as both risks and protective factors for this population.

Bennett’s (2015) narrative research presents a snapshot of experiences among formerly incarcerated Aboriginal adults in the Prairies. All participants were parents at the time of incarceration, and the majority experienced state apprehension of their children (Bennett, 2015). Two women gave birth while incarcerated, visited the infants within the facility, and hoped to regain custody (Bennett, 2015). Many participants were unaware that visitation was possible once incarcerated, and some were denied visitation, or did not want their children to see them imprisoned (Bennett, 2015).

**Caregivers and Home Instability**

Living arrangements present an additional challenge for children of incarcerated parents. Phillips and Gates (2010) find that children of incarcerated parents are twice as likely to experience family instability in comparison with other children. Parental arrest may trigger a change in caregivers, and prolonged or recidivist incarceration may result in a series of caregivers (Phillips & Gates, 2010). Dalley’s (2002) study found that impacted children experience an average of three changes in caregivers, facing adjustment to multiple homes, parenting styles, and schools. Informal caregiving placements with other family members or friends may result in inadequate supervision or financial struggle
(Aaron & Dallaire 2010; Adalist-Estrin, 2006; McCormick et al., 2014). For example, Hanlon, Carswell and Rose (2006) found that guardianship by grandparents may present family financial vulnerability, a reduction in work hours and/or use of savings, stress, and alienation. Children in foster care may face distinct challenges to development, involuntary placement, and termination of parental contact (Provincial Advocate for Children & Youth, 2012; Representative for Children and Youth, 2009).

In a survey of incarcerated women in Ontario, Cunningham and Baker (2003) found that half of participants reported that their children had to change residences, and half had siblings living separately from them. Overall, 8% of the women felt that the current placement of their children was unsafe, and 23% had mixed feelings regarding the safety of the placement (Cunningham & Baker 2003). Mothers reported that 21% of children were living in foster care, and 24% with fathers, further 59% of mothers reported prior conflict with the children’s father (Cunningham & Baker, 2003). A total 83% of women reported that they did not have adequate time to arrange caregivers for their children prior to incarceration (Cunningham & Baker, 2003).

**Emotional Effects of Parental Incarceration**

The degree and nature of children’s psychological and social struggles resulting from parental incarceration depend on multiple factors. Emotional responses may vary according to the state of the relationship with the incarcerated parent, age at the time of separation, and ability to understand and cope with the situation (Adalist-Estrin, 2006; Cunningham & Baker, 2003; Johnston, 2006; Murray & Farrington, 2006; Poehlmann, 2005a). Impacted children may experience shame, guilt, abandonment, humiliation, grief, loneliness, isolation, confusion, stress, frustration, aggression, among other emotions (Bates, Lawrence-Wills & Hairston, 2003; Blanchard, 2004; Cunningham & Baker, 2003; Dallaire, 2010; Murray & Farrington, 2005, 2008; Poehlmann, 2005b; Wilbur et al., 2007). Parental arrest may be a traumatic experience (Roberts et al., 2013), and separation by incarceration may trigger mental illness such as depression and anxiety (Murray & Murray, 2010). Allard (2012) found that parental absence weakens a sense of safety and security, and may disrupt current and future ability to build trusting and healthy relationships. Further, Aaron & Dallaire, (2010) note that children may also experience emotional stress for long durations of time with parental transitions back to the household.
Age-Specific Challenges

Incarceration of a parent is harmful to the psychological and social development of children according to developmental stage (Hanlon et al., 2006). In contrast to younger children, youth may experience the compounded effects of multiple episodes or long periods of parental incarceration (Johnston, 2012). Youth may express repeat (type II) trauma by engaging in delinquency, self-harm, acting aggressively, or substance abuse (Cunningham & Baker, 2003, 2004; Crenshaw, 2013). Attachment theory provides explanation for why youth with incarcerated parents are impacted in age-specific ways, and indicates pathways to resilience (Dallaire & Zeman, 2013; Poelmann, 2010). According to Dallaire and Zeman (2013), attachment theory suggests maintaining a secure relationship with incarcerated parents may protect from some risks associated with the separation. For example, attachment through parental relationships promotes the development of the protective factor of empathy, by nurturing empathic awareness and skills (Dallaire & Zeman, 2013). Emotive traits are critical for socio-emotional development, prosocial behaviour, and healthy relationships (Dallaire & Zeman, 2013).

Communication and Visitation

Regular visitation may strengthen the child-parent relationship, thereby facilitating resiliency, and the re-integration of the family post-release (Bales & Mears, 2008; Derkzen, Gobeil, & Gileno, 2009; Trice & Brewster, 2004). Visiting programs are available in provincial and federal Canadian institutions; however, communication between incarcerated parents and children may be intermittent due to multiple issues. Disruptions to visitation include transportation costs and means, unfriendly settings for children, visiting times in conflict of school hours, and restricted contact (Beck & Jones 2007; Blanchard, 2004; Derkzen & Taylor, 2013; Withers & Folsom, 2007). Johnson (2012) states that correctional facilities simply “are not designed to meet the needs of children” (p. 93). Specifically, a visit may be characterized by long waits, security checks, visits behind glass, lack of amenities, and being turned away after travelling significant distances (Dallaire, Loper, & Shear, 2010; Hairston, 2007; Martynowicz, 2011; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008, 2011; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010).
**Academic Challenges**

Dallaire (2010) notes that children experiencing parental incarceration may experience academic challenges such as difficulty with concentration and disruptiveness. Academic outcomes may suffer, for example a greater likelihood of grade retention (Turney & Haskins, 2014). Bayes (2007) identifies that teachers generally notice child distress due to daily contact, yet do not receive training or resources on this topic in BC. A teacher who is aware of a child’s situation can help them cope with stressors in the environment, for example when asking students to speak or write about their family. In Dallaire, Ciccone and Wilson’s survey of Virginian teachers (2009), teachers reported that they notice emotional and physical changes, such as emotional disturbances, internalizing (feeling sick), and externalizing (acting out in class). Teachers stated it would be helpful for them to gain awareness of a child dealing with parental incarceration and information on how they can help (Dallaire et al., 2009). Foster and Hagan (2015) argue that education is a pivotal pathway that links parental incarceration to child social exclusion or inclusion.

**Delinquent Behaviour and Intergenerational Incarceration**

A large number of studies suggest that children with incarcerated parents have increased risk for maladjustment, antisocial, or other delinquent behaviours, and future involvement with the criminal justice system (e.g., Aaron & Dallaire, 2010; Farrington, 2004; Huebner & Gustafson, 2007; Murray & Farrington, 2005; Murray, Janson, & Farrington, 2007; Krohn, & Smith, 2003; Thombre et al., 2009; Thornberry et al., 2003; Trice & Brewster, 2004; Widom, 2000; Withers & Folsom, 2007). While impacted children may have increased risks and threats present in their micro and meso-environments, the literature has a tendency to view children of incarcerated parents as predisposed to follow their parent’s example in a deterministic fashion, and without consideration of the multiple identities, privileges, and oppressions that children may have simultaneously.

Kopak and Ruiz-Smith state that parental incarceration will “undeniably” redirect paths setting many on a trajectory to behavioural issues (Kopak & Smith-Ruiz, 2015, p.3). The authors explain that a lack of parental guidance during critical development years is a turning point that leads to unwise decisions and engaging in high-risk behaviour (Kopak & Smith-Ruiz, 2015). The literature suggests that adolescence is a period of shifting social
allegiances, and parental absence may increase favour toward antisocial peers (Hanlon et al., 2006). This assertion assumes many factors in the lives of impacted children (e.g., exposure to antisocial friend groups), while ignoring others (e.g., availability of program supports). There is a lack of sensitivity to the layered experiences, including protective and risk factors, that children may have.

Some authors identify the importance of refocusing on resilience, but are a minority in the literature (e.g., Bocknek et al., 2009; Johnson & Easterling, 2015; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Delinquency and intergenerational transmission of incarceration is a significant focus in the literature, which may be misguided. This focus may cause policy actors to overlook the general welfare of children of incarcerated parents, and create a gap in support for children who are not generating attention through delinquency (Morgan et al., 2013). When impacted children do receive policy attention, it often focuses on the role of family life in reducing parental recidivism, and reducing antisocial behaviour in children (Morgan et al., 2013). A general focus on parents, instead of children, is evident in the literature (e.g., Roxburgh & Fitch, 2014; Shortt et al., 2014; Swanson et al., 2013). Akesson et al. (2012) argue that it is reductionist to infer that negative outcomes are directly associated with parental arrest. It is beneficial to instead focus on the importance of proactively supporting resilience in all children (Akesson et al., 2012), and parental arrest should serve as a trigger point for early intervention (Burns et al., 2007).

**Literature Review Summary**

In sum, little research is available in Canada regarding children of incarcerated parents (Cunningham & Baker, 2003), and available research present limitations that this study hopes to address. The nature of parent-child separation, and its distinctness, is an area to explore, in particular experiences of stigma. The emotional experiences of children are an additional theme to examine, as well as age-specific experiences of youth. Visitation and communication are substantial themes in the literature, and concrete ways to improve these venues are needed. Academic challenges and the role of educational professionals are also suitable for exploration. Lastly, a refocusing on resilience, instead of the inevitability of poor outcomes, is a significant theme for future examination.
Chapter 3.  Background

Overview

This section provides background to the policy problem, and establishes the context that policy interventions are situated in pertaining to children of incarcerated parents in BC. It presents context of who has looked at this issue before internationally, nationally, and provincially, and what actors concluded or implemented. It describes incarceration trends, policy obligations, and stakeholders which frame provincial response to this issue.

Statistical Trends

The number of children with incarcerated parents is estimated by NGOs to be 180,000 to 350,000 (CFCN et al., 2013; personal interview), a specific figure is unavailable due to lack of data collection and collation. Examining statistical trends offers additional information beyond what an aggregate number offers. The number of incarcerated individuals is growing, sizable numbers of prisoners are parents, and Aboriginal women and youth are disproportionately impacted.

Incarceration Trends: Adults and Youth

Canada has an overall incarceration rate of 118 sentenced offenders per 100,000 persons in the population, ranking high in comparison with other developed countries (Public Safety Canada, 2013). On any given day in 2013/2014, there were 139,337 adult offenders in provincial/territorial or federal correctional services (Statistics Canada, 2014a). Of this number, 22,895 were in federal prison, a rate of 81 per 100,000 adults in the population (Statistics Canada, 2014a). There were 116,442 in provincial custody or a community program, a rate of 492 per 100,000 adults in the population (Statistics Canada, 2014a). Of this number, 11,493 were in remand awaiting trial/sentencing, and 9,889 in sentenced custody (Statistics Canada, 2014a). Surveys of prisoners have found that large proportions of incarcerated adults report being parents of children who are legal minors (Barrett et al., 2010; Vis-Dunbar, 2008). For example, Barrett et al.’s (2010) survey of federally sentenced women found that 77% of women indicate they have children. Corrections Canada reports that two thirds of women in custody are mothers (CSC, 2015).
The number of children with incarcerated parents may be increasing over the past decade with increasing rates of incarcerated women in Canada (Public Safety Canada, 2013; Sapers, 2013; Statistics Canada, 2013). The number of women admitted to federal jurisdiction increased 69.6% from 204 in 2002-03 to 346 in 2011-12 (Public Safety Canada, 2013). The number of women admitted to BC provincial institutions increased 70.6% from 697 in 2000/01 to 987 in 2013/14 (Statistics Canada, 2014b).

Among women in provincial/territorial corrections (15% total), 67.8% of convicted women receive a sentence of one month or less, while another 23.8% are given a sentence between one and six months (Public Safety Canada, 2013). Only 2% of women convicted of a crime in Canada receive a federal sentence (Public Safety Canada, 2013). Shorter sentences are significant, as they have implications for dependent children experiencing temporary caregiving disruptions, and program delivery tailored for longer time frames. Children thus experience parental incarceration heterogeneously (Turney & Wildeman, 2015), and may encounter temporary, cyclical, or permanent parental absence.

In 2013/2014, there were 9,458 youth supervised daily in Canada, and 90% (8,514) were supervised in the community (Statistics Canada, 2014c). Undeniably, some youth in the correctional system are children of incarcerated parents themselves. However, there is no data available on the proportion of youth in the correctional system who have children of their own.

Aboriginal adults are over-represented in incarceration admissions to provincial/territorial correctional services, accounting for 3% of the population of Canada, yet 27% of adults in provincial/territorial custody (jails), and 23% of adults in federal custody (prisons) (Bennett, 2015; Dauvergne, 2012). Aboriginal women account for a higher proportion of admissions to provincial/territorial sentenced custody (36%) than Aboriginal male admissions (25%). Aboriginal youth are also over-represented in the correctional system, accounting for 41% of provincial youth custody admissions, while representing 7% of the youth population in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2015b).

Furthermore, from 2007-2012 the federal offender population increased by 7%; this growth was primarily driven by an increase in federally incarcerated Aboriginal offenders (46.4% generally and 80% for Aboriginal women), while the rate of federal
incarceration of non-Aboriginal offenders decreased (Sapers, 2013). Aboriginal over-representation exists in a context of multi-century British and Canadian colonialism. This history produces negative impacts on Aboriginal families and communities, and is perpetuated through attitudinal and institutional racism (Corrado, Kuehn, & Margaritescu, 2014). The population of children of incarcerated parents may be growing in Canada, and disproportionately comprised of Aboriginal children.

**International Conventions: United Nations**

Canada is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), an international treaty that seeks to protect the rights of children worldwide (Blanchfield, 2010; UN, 2011). CRC entered into force in September 1990, indicating international recognition of the need to ensure child development through policy (Tang, 2015). Countries that are party to CRC, including Canada, agree to take all appropriate measures to safeguard the rights set forth in the Convention (Tang, 2015).

**Day of General Discussion (DGD) on Children of Incarcerated Parents**

In 2011, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child convened a Day of General Discussion (DGD) on Children of Incarcerated Parents (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2011). In addition to raising awareness about the rights of children affected by parental incarceration, the DGD put forward a number of recommendations for countries to implement. It is well documented at the international level that children are often adversely impacted by parental incarceration, and that their best interests are not necessarily considered (Robertson, 2012). Inaction or insufficient response, denying children the rights guaranteed to them, may lead to a possible violation of child rights.

UN DGD recommendations are comprehensive and address: the effects of incarceration on children’s right to development and non-discrimination, the importance of family cohabitation and visitation, respect for the views of the child, the need for information sharing, insuring access to remote communication, and training for professionals (UN, 2011). These recommendations are important background considerations in approaching the policy problem and developing new domestic policy. A summary of recommendations is available in Appendix A.
Additional UN Policy

The UN has looked at this issue multiple times, given its importance, and set forth additional policy regarding the rights of children with incarcerated parents including:


3. Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders (Bangkok Rules) (UN General Assembly, 2010).

Federal Policy: Corrections

The administration of adult correctional services, custody, and community supervision in Canada is a jurisdictional responsibility held by both federal and provincial/territorial governments (Dauvergne, 2012). At the federal level, the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) operates prisons through the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (1992), Corrections, and Conditional Release Regulations (1992). Generally, the federal system has jurisdiction over adult offenders serving sentences two years or more, and the provincial system has jurisdiction over offenders serving sentences under two years and community sentences (Dauvergne, 2012). There is limited mention of children under the Regulations (CSC, 1992). Commissioner Directives note children in discussion of supervising women offenders with children residing at community-based residential facilities (CSC, 2012), and the federal Mother-Child Program (CSC, 2003). Children are otherwise absent in publically available federal corrections policy documents.

Federal Government Reports

Office of the Correctional Investigator

The Correctional Investigator produces annual reports to parliament on the status of the federal corrections system along with recommendations (Sapers, 2014). These reports provide some mention of children with incarcerated individuals. In the most recent publication, a recommendation was provided to implement ChildLink in all regional women’s facilities (Sapers, 2014). ChildLink facilitates video communication between parents and children, and was recommended given the importance of maintaining parent-
child bonds (Sapers, 2014). This publication notes the importance of communications in parent relationships, and was reported to federal parliament, meaning the federal government has had some exposure to this issue.

**Task Force on Federally Incarcerated Women**

*Creating Choices*, the 1989 Task Force on Federally Incarcerated Woman, sought to address issues facing woman inmates at the Prison for Women in Kingston, Ontario (Barrett, Allenby, & Taylor, 2010; Solicitor General Canada, 1996). Children are not the primary focus of this report, but it makes recommendations with particular relevance to them. Specifically, the task force identifies geographic isolation as an issue preventing contact between mothers and children and the report emphasizes the importance of maternal contact and cohabitation (Brennan, 2014). Based on recommendations, CSC developed federal facilities to allow the creation of the Mother-Child Program (MCP) (Brennan, 2014). Barrett et al. (2010) revisited the Task Force report 20 years later, surveying women in Ontario prisons. Findings include that 77% of women prisoners have children, motherhood is central to their lives, and many express concern about family communication and related costs (Barrett et al., 2010). This indicates a possible area for further examination and policy development.

**Provincial Receptivity to Policy Issue**

It is useful to situate policy and service delivery in the overall political context, including overarching priorities of the Government of BC. The government is committed to a “Families First” (2011) agenda, which offers alignment with improving the wellbeing of vulnerable youth. One of the pillars is to support vulnerable families by reducing poverty and helping vulnerable children get a good start (BC Gov., 2011). Government is additionally committed to controlled spending and implementing initiatives to support a “lean,” efficient government (MCFD, 2015). Ministries must support fiscal discipline through budget management, and clarifying and prioritizing strategic work (MCFD, 2015). This context has implications for the receptivity of new policy and policy expectations.

Provincial standing committee meetings have received presentations on the topic of children of incarcerated parents. In 2006, the Executive Director of EFry Vancouver, Shawn Bayes, brought the issue of children of incarcerated parents before the Select
Standing Committee on Education (Legislative Assembly, 2006). Bayes discussed the challenges facing incarcerated families and service providers, and the need for resources (Legislative Assembly, 2006). Likewise, in 2013 the Representative for Children and Youth, Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, presented to the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth and reported that she had a discussion with a group of researchers (e.g., McCormick et al.) investigating the impact of incarceration on children. She noted the importance of beginning to understand the impact of incarceration on families and to develop appropriate policies as the population expands (Legislative Assembly, 2013). There may be some provincial political awareness of this issue; however, little policy action has occurred to date.

While there is a history of limited receptivity to this issue in BC, other districts in Canada are increasing supports to maximize resilience among at-risk youth. For example, the Ontario District of Peel made funding available for new or enhanced programs fostering resilience (LaMoine, 2014). Internationally, jurisdictions such as Northern Ireland have recognized the importance of family ties in enhancing children’s outcomes, and are strengthening family services and engagement as part of offender rehabilitation and desistance (McCrudden et al., 2014; Northern Ireland Department of Justice, 2015).

**Provincial Policy: Child Welfare, Corrections, and Education**

**Child Welfare**

The following policy areas are significant arenas where professionals interact with children, collect information, and provide services. The most notable system in this discussion is child welfare, which functions to protect the safety and wellbeing of children (Gough, 2007). The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) oversees the quality and delivery of child protection services throughout the province (MCFD, 2015). In addition to child protection, regional offices are mandated to provide specialised services, such as mental health supports (Gough, 2007). BC also has a Delegated Aboriginal Agency (DAA), providing child protection and family support services to Aboriginal families (Gough, 2007). Staff at these agencies may encounter and provide support to youth of incarcerated parents.
BC’s *Child, Family, and Community Service Act* (CFCS) (1996) is the legislative authority for child welfare in the province. It outlines the conditions that render it necessary to intervene for the wellbeing of children with a Family Development Response (FDR) or a Child Protection Investigation Response (CPIR). CFCS has several guiding principles and three stand out for the purposes of this study. CFCS entitles children to protection from abuse, neglect, and harm, or threat of harm (Gov. BC, 1996). Staff should consider a child’s views in decisions regarding the child. Further, CFCS stipulates that staff should preserve kinship ties, attachment to extended family, and the cultural identity of Aboriginal children (Gov. BC, 1996).

MCFD also has a *Youth Policy Framework* (2000) which is a visionary document presenting policy goals and principles pertaining to youth. Promoting permanency is especially notable, specifically that all children require permanent families that provide safe, stable, nurturing homes, and “lifelong relationships” (MCFD, 2012, p.9). The report considers out-of-home placements as a bridge before reunification with parents or other family. The intention is that permanency is attained quickly and safety, and MCFD’s service plan reiterates the importance of these principles (MCFD, 2012, 2014).

**Provincial Corrections**

In addition to the child welfare system, the corrections system may also have contact with this population of children. BC Corrections is in charge of the custody of incarcerated individuals, and facilitates inmate programming, visitation, and release (Ministry of Justice, 2013). The *Correction Act* (2004) and the *Correction Act Regulations* (2005) governs the agency. While there is little mention of children in these policies, a corrections program directly relating to infants exists, the Mother-Child Program (MCP). MCP operates at the Alouette Correctional Centre for Women (ACCW) to align with direction from a provincial Supreme Court decision (Ministry of Justice, 2014).

**Education, Youth Justice, and Health**

Provincial education, youth justice, and health systems may also have contact with children of incarcerated parents. Most saliently, teachers often have regular interaction with children of incarcerated parents, and the capacity to notice issues and connect children with support services if needed (Bayes, 2007). As service providers, teachers are
required to be aware of the signs of abuse or neglect and to report to MCFD (MCFD, Child Protection Handbook, n.d.). There does not appear to be any educational policy directly pertaining to children of incarcerated parents in BC.

**Provincial Policy Gaps**

Despite the presence of provincial child welfare policy, there are notable silences relating to children of incarcerated individuals in policy documents. For example, there appears to be no protocols to ensure children are with appropriate caregivers following parental arrest (McCormick et al., 2014). The extent of data collection upon parental arrest and incarceration to record information about impacted children is not publically shared, despite the precedent of data collection in federal Offender Intake Assessments (Brown & Motiuk, 2005; McCormick et al., 2014). There is an absence of information sharing protocols to ensure support systems are activated upon arrest for children (Cunningham & Baker, 2003; McCormick et al., 2014). There is also a lack of integrated strategies for at-risk children, especially Aboriginal children (Corrado et al., 2014).

Moreover, there is limited support available after the system incarcerates a parent. There is no mention of training for service providers on how to assist impacted children (Cunningham & Baker, 2003; McCormick et al., 2014). Further, there is no process to identify impacted children; teachers are often unaware and may not activate support services (Bayes, 2007; McCormick et al., 2014). Lastly, there is a lack of sentencing policies to reduce the incidence of incarceration for primary caregivers, and present community sanctions as an alternative (Corrado et al., 2014).

**Provincial Government Reports**

Amidst a lack of policy response, the Office of the Public Health Officer (PHO) produces reports relevant to this discussion. Most notably, *Health, Crime, and Doing Time* (2013) examines the impacts of Bill C-10 on the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people in the province. The report references Aboriginal children as vulnerable for poor health and future justice-involvement. PHO specifically notes that children of incarcerated women are more likely to have a destabilized life, move homes and schools, and be placed in foster care (PHO, 2013). PHO explains that the “complex web of risk factors and vulnerabilities” commence in childhood, and dedicated supports are required (PHO, 2013,
Similar to *Creating Choices* (1989) and the Correctional Investigator's report (2014), parental contact is identified as important for the wellbeing of children and parents.

**Programs: Federal, Provincial, and Non-Profit**

A limited number of programs and services operate in Canada for children with incarcerated parents. The Correctional Service of Canada operates visitation programs, such as the Private Family Visiting (PFV) program which provides up to 72 hours of consecutive visiting to eligible inmates and children (Cunningham & Baker, 2003; Correctional Service of Canada, 2012). MCP administered by Corrections Canada, offers full-time and part-time visitation for children at federal women’s prisons, but is underutilized (Brennan, 2014; CSC, 2015).

In BC there is an iteration of MCP, which allows incarcerated women who give birth to cohabitate with their infant for a period of time (Granger-Brown et al., 2012; Ministry of Justice, 2014). Services for children and families impacted by incarceration are also provided by non-profit agencies at the provincial level, e.g., JustKids is run by EFry in Greater Vancouver, BC, and offers Saturday and summer clubs, summer camps, in addition to transportation to visit incarcerated parents (EFry, 2015). EFry in Manitoba runs Precious Pals, pairing volunteers with children to serve as role models for prosocial behaviour (EFry, 2015). FEAT operates in Toronto, Ontario, and provides mentoring, homework clubs, transportation to facilities, and camps (FEAT, 2015).

**Stakeholders: From Children to NGOs**

Stakeholders to the policy issue include a multitude of actors, including:

1. Children of Incarcerated Parents (currently or previously incarcerated) consisting of children and youth, as well as adults who had those formative experiences.

2. Families and caregivers of children with incarcerated parents.

3. Provincial government: Ministry of Child and Family Development, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education; Ministry of Health; Office Representative of Children and Youth. Current and former public servants within these ministries: e.g., social workers, counsellors.

5. Non-profits organizations that provide support to incarcerated individuals and their families: Elizabeth Fry Society, John Howard Society, FEAT, and Canadian Families and Corrections Network (CFCN).

6. First Nations in Canada, including organizations such as The Assembly of First Nations, and Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC).

7. Child and youth advocacy coalitions: First Call BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition representing 40 organizations and hundreds of community organizations.

8. International organizations: e.g., UN.

9. Academic researchers: e.g., researchers at UFV.

It is important to be aware of stakeholders to the issue, since stakeholder knowledge and expectations foreshadow policy options, and this list also indicates the parties who may offer involvement in the policy making process.

**Background Summary**

Canada is subject to International Conventions on the topic of children with incarcerated parents, and provincial obligations for at-risk youth are well-established. Federal and provincial agencies including Corrections Canada have limited policy pertaining directly to impacted children. Some federal and provincial reports have noted the presence of impacted children, but have not focused on children in depth. Overall, few programs operate across the country assisting impacted youth. Aboriginal individuals are over-represented in corrections admissions, and Aboriginal children may be disproportionately impacted. Further, a number of stakeholders are present in this issue, and acknowledged in later policy analysis.
Chapter 4. Methodology

Purpose

This methodology provided a range of expert participants with the opportunity to contribute ideas to a policy project on this topic, and assist in reducing the knowledge gap – the first of its kind in BC. Youth participation was also sought, but not attained due to time constraints and the importance of extended relationship-building. Gaining youth participation in the future is still critical, as few studies consult youth with incarcerated parents directly. The research question driving expert interviews was: how can governments support the resiliency, wellbeing, and life outcomes of youth with incarcerated parents in BC?

Prior Qualitative Research Model

Flynn et al.’s (2015) Australian study provided guidance on the development of the expert interview methodology for this capstone. In Flynn et al.’s (2015) study, professional stakeholders from a wide variety of sectors were selected and invited to interviews, in addition to recruitment through snowball sampling. Experts were asked about their opinions as service providers, organizational perspective of impacted children, expectations in responding to this population, current process for responding, and suggestions for improvements (Flynn et al., 2015). Similar to Flynn et al. (2015), this capstone sought broad understandings of the issue, current responses, and recommended policy pathways from experts representing a range of experiences in the field of practice. Pre-existing interview schedules were not available for adaptation in this study, and so interview themes were developed from the literature review and Flynn et al.’s (2015) article in particular.

Research Paradigm

A constructionist paradigm informs the design and analysis of the study. This study intends to build understanding between the interview participants and researcher regarding the research question. Constructionism is relativist, meaning that realities are multiple, and people socially create them (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Constructionist epistemology is transactional and subjectivist, indicating that the interviewer and
interviewee relate interactively, and create knowledge together as the interview progresses (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The interviewer’s voice is a fellow participant in interviews and actively engages in conversation to learn about experiences and opinions, to gain understanding on the research question (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The aim of constructionist inquiry is to reconstruct the understandings that people initially have, to move towards improved, revised, and more sophisticated understandings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This aim is particularly useful with this topic, since pre-existing beliefs and stigma embody understandings of incarceration and family, and the goal of this study is not to perpetuate hurtful labels and biases when speaking with participants and disseminating findings. This aim is also important given that interview participants are part of the supports and services which require improvement. To be clear, all views, including stigmatizing ones, were recorded to accurately present expert views – the interviewer explored expert ideas in depth and as part of the conversation made suggestions of alternative ways of perceiving issues present in the literature and background literature.

**Interviews: Expert Participants**

The interviews conducted for this capstone were with professionals who are decision-makers, or individuals who advocate, research, or work on behalf or directly with youth of incarcerated parents. Participants have experience in a range of sectors including Canadian non-profits, the child welfare system, academia, and the corrections system. Ethics approval was granted prior to interview recruitment and data collection.

**Expert Interview Recruitment and Procedures**

Experts were identified by internet search and literature review, and participants were recruited directly by email. An information letter and consent form was shared with the initial email (Appendices C and E), and semi-structured phone interviews lasted for 30-45 minutes. Each participant provided a signed consent form or provided verbal consent at the beginning of interview. A series of questions were then asked about perceptions and responses regarding the policy issue, and policy solutions to assist youth with incarcerated parents. The conversation was recorded using an electronic recorder with participant consent. At the end of each interview, the principal investigator debriefed with the participant, allowing the opportunity to ask questions and/or withdraw data.
Experts were also invited to share the study with colleagues who may also like to participate, employing a snow-ball recruitment technique.

**Interview Data Analysis**

Interview data was thematically analyzed using the process presented by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method entails transcription, reading, rereading, initial coding, and revised coding to construct sophisticated themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Within this process a hybrid inductive and deductive approach was also used. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane’s (2006) hybrid approach entails first generating codes inductively by examining the data in its own right. The deductive component is using a template, drawing on codes generated from the literature to help identify or refine themes in the interview data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). It is an iterative and reflexive process; interviews and analysis were conducted concurrently in this study. See Appendix I for the final coding list.

Braun and Clarke (2006) identify that thematic analysis should be viewed as a foundational method for qualitative analysis. The accessibility and pervasiveness of this technique, as well as prior use by the researcher, led to its selection for this study. Thematic analysis complements a constructionist paradigm, allowing examination of the ways that meanings are the effects of discourses within a society (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It invites individuals to question pre-existing categories and to form new ones (Burr, 2003). For example, understandings were explored in-depth with participants, and not taken for granted or assumed to align with the literature.

**Interviews: Youth of Incarcerated Parents**

This study originally sought to feature in-person semi-structured interviews with BC youth ages 14 to 18, who have a parent (or parents) that are currently incarcerated or have a history of incarceration in provincial or federal correctional facilities. While these interviews did not take place, this methodology was in place for most of the duration of the study, and may prove useful for future research. An older age group (youth) was selected to solicit the views of a group that have not been consulted in Canadian research. Youth who are 14 or older also have greater capacity to provide consent in such research according to the “rules of sevens” and “mature minor doctrine” (Wendler, 2011). There is
risk for youth emotional discomfort due to the subject matter, as well as benefits by inviting youth to have a voice in policy research.

**Youth Interview Recruitment**

Youth participant recruitment was facilitated through partner organizations: MCFD, based in Chilliwack, BC; and EFry based in New Westminster, BC. Partner organizations are necessary in the recruitment process, as they are the main conduits that link to prospective participants. It is difficult to share the project with youth of incarcerated parents otherwise, since they are a geographically and socially diffuse group. A youth information letter and consent form created by the researcher was shared by the two organizations with youth (Appendices B and D). Instructions and a script for organizations to use when contacting youth by phone, email, or in person was also crafted by the researcher. Participants interested in joining the study were instructed to contact the researcher using information provided in the recruitment materials.

**Youth Interview Procedures**

The study design envisioned prospective youth participants contacting the researcher to set a date for an in-person, semi-structured interview at a location choice in the Lower Mainland or Fraser Valley of BC. The benefit of having multiple location options is that youth can indicate which place is most convenient and comfortable for them. Youth with siblings had the option to be interviewed together, as this may help some participants feel more comfortable while protecting privacy. Interviews were intended to last for a duration of about 45 minutes, maintain confidentiality and privacy, and offer an honorarium (a $15 gift card). Support workers were available for on-location support if an interview was booked, and a list of supports was prepared if the youth wanted any assistance after an interview (Appendix F).

The interview design called for first introducing the list of topics for discussion at the start of the interview, to provide an opportunity to identify any topics the participant does not want to discuss. A series of questions were prepared inquiring about youth experiences and opinions regarding program/service provision (Appendix G). Regular check-ins of the youth’s wellbeing and a debriefing period were also planned in interviews.
Youth interviews were anticipated as an integral component of this study, and this methodology was recognized as a significant opportunity to build knowledge and include youth in research. The youth interview methodology was in place for most of the research process. Throughout the project it became clear that a longer research period was required with increased opportunity for relationship-building. The insights gained from seeking to implement this methodology are provided in the next section with more detail.
Chapter 5. Results

Expert Interviews

A total of ten expert interviews were conducted with professionals in academia, federal and provincial agencies, and the voluntary sector. It was useful to seek the insights of professionals from multiple domains to capture varying perspectives regarding the nature of the problem in BC, and insights on resilience as a focus in policy solutions. Interviews were completed primarily in December 2015 and January 2016, and all interviews were conducted by phone due to participant preference. The average length of an interview was 35 minutes, and in debriefing participants expressed positive feedback.

Expert responses regarding the nature of the policy problem and solutions vary according to individual exposure to the topic and role in the field of practice, with much commonality of thought, and a few differences. Many of the ideas offered in interviews are present in the literature, including research in BC (McCormick et al., 2014). Ideas previously not examined in this jurisdiction among experts are noted in the following discussion and include resilience and protective factors, the level to target supports (children or families), and a range of policy solutions. A full code list of interview themes is available in Appendix I. Collecting and analysing data concurrently proved useful, as it provided the ability to see where data was lacking, to ask questions missed in other interviews, and to determine when data collection reached saturation and interviews were no longer necessary.

Experts: Life Experiences and Challenges of Youth

Experts indicated overarching life experiences that impacted youth in BC may share. Youth may experience multiple challenges, such as poverty, placement in foster care, and exposure to parental substance abuse and/or mental health challenges. Youth may also experience a cycle of repeated parental incarceration, with parents serving multiple sentences over their lifetime. The risk of repeat incarceration is an interesting finding in the interviews, since experts consider multiple short sentences in provincial institutions more disruptive to the lives of youth than one long separation (federal incarceration). Institutions linked to provincial incarceration are identified as prime
locations for support interventions to insure the proper consideration and care of impacted youth. In line with the other interviews, one expert suggested that supporting impacted youth and families: “should be part and parcel of how we do justice.”

Experts note a plethora of overarching challenges that youth may experience as a result of parental incarceration. Most notable is social stigma, which is particularly nocuous for children and families of incarcerated individuals. Additional emotional and social challenges include identity, which was an interesting concept to emerge in interviews. Identity links to a developmental framework, and is particularly important in adolescence. Separation from parents may make the transition to adulthood more difficult or tenuous for youth. Impacted youth may also experience associated feelings of social isolation, and difficulty with social labelling and fitting in with peers. The following quote exemplifies common opinion among experts: “…separation due to incarceration is incredibly stressful, and the stigma, and the shame around it is very, very difficult for older kids.”

**Experts: Parental Contact**

Experts also note that youth may find it difficult to attain or maintain contact with parents and family, or even to obtain information on their parent’s status. Separation from mothers is identified as particularly difficult due to the physical distance youth may have from the sole federal women’s institution in BC. Youth may feel a sense of uncertainty and of being uprooted, experiencing knock-on effects in academic performance and mental wellbeing. An interesting theme is that youth may also be less adaptable than younger children, and experience the effects of parental incarceration in a more pronounced way, with impacts on the developmental transition to adulthood.

A thought-provoking contrast among interviews concerns the “best interests” of youth regarding maintaining contact with parents. Most experts state that parental contact is indispensable for both youth and parents when possible, and strongly believe it must be supported and encouraged. In the words of one expert: “… they want to be connected to their parents, they have that loyalty, but they are not really supported to have that connection so it creates a bit of an emotional, internal crisis for them.” A contrasting opinion is that youth may not want contact, or that it may be damaging for them to maintain it due to the specific relationship with the parent. The continual separation and
reunification of parents and children can be damaging, when permanence is stressed as crucial for children. An additional idea of autonomy or a stronger role in decision making for youth in establishing contact and direction on other issues also emerged. Throughout all interviews was the understanding that each youth has individual needs and context, requiring individual assessment and a tailored response.

**Experts: Development**

Experts note that youth may encounter increased risk to successful development and that patterns of incarceration may be intergenerational. A commonality among experts is that trauma and outcomes of incarceration can repeat among generations, and a lack of policy response may predispose a new generation of incarcerated individuals. Impacted youth may exhibit delinquency in early adolescence, and have early contact with the justice system. One expert noted: “…in some populations it gets to the place where essentially the children are replacing their parents in prison.” Experts indicate that Aboriginal youth disproportionately experience these negative impacts.

**Experts: Protective Factors**

The central protective factor identified by experts is a connection to parents, extended family, and other concerned adults. The importance of culture for Aboriginal children was also discussed. Protective factors and associated terms (see Chapter 3) such as the significance of developing positive personality traits (e.g., resourcefulness), hobbies and passions, and peer support were less prevalent in interviews. This indicates that experts focus more closely on familial connections due to perceived significance of that factor for this population. Overall, the importance of contact with biological family, or other concerned adults, was a constant theme in the interviews.

**Experts: Policy Changes**

Suggested policy changes to benefit youth focus on increasing parenting supports for those currently incarcerated, as well as resources for families who may be struggling in the community. Increasing the quality of contact with parents is an associated suggestion, as one expert expressed: “The evidence shows that we need to strengthen the family unit. Parents can gain skills if they need them. Youth need to know they are
loved.” In addition, offering training to caregivers is also identified as imperative in facilitating the biological parent-child bond. Overall, the family and community, rather than the youth in isolation, was generally identified as the necessary target of support. This contrasts much of the literature which focuses on mentoring programs that focus attention specifically to individual youth. Some experts who work exclusively with youth (and not families/parents) or on an academic track differed by suggesting interventions solely for youth. Experts also note the value of providing training to staff and others who work with youth including teachers, social workers, corrections staff, and managers.

Increasing the integration of services is an additional finding to emerge in interviews, with most experts indicating an integrated intra-ministry effort is required. Also noted is the lack of research regarding the issue, as well as the overall absence of data collection on the numbers and characteristics of youth. Experts perceive that the provision of support is linked to having robust data; in the words of one expert: “The biggest resiliency factor for a kid, living with any adversity, is a supportive adult who really takes an interest in the wellbeing of the child. And so we really need to identify these children, of course not to publically identify them, but we need to find a way.” Overall, participants identified the need for more research, data, and awareness.

Additional policy suggestions by experts include: greater mechanisms for community-based conditional sentencing to help prevent parental separation, developing supports which are culturally-based, greater respect and engagement of youth on this policy issue, improving societal awareness and countering stigma, and more broadly addressing the intergenerational impacts of colonialism. One very insightful expert comment is that: “residential schools were the incarceration of children” and now the inverse is happening with parents being separated from children through incarceration.

An interesting suggestion with relevance to policy studies is the need to prepare for a policy window, by generating a research base, promoting awareness among practitioners in the field, and finding a political champion to push for change. Participants also identify the need to scope the issue well, particularly by linking the issue to a broader population with more awareness (e.g., at-risk youth), shifting the usage of language to help cement the need for attention for this group (e.g., referring to impacted youth as a
distinct group), and focusing on aspects of the issue which may get more attention (i.e., cost-savings of preventing intergenerational incarceration).

**Experts: Summary**

Overall, experts note that this is a complex issue which requires a multi-focal approach of change. Support and transformation is particularly needed for Aboriginal youth, who are over-represented as children of incarcerated parents. One expert noted that: "There aren’t any magic solutions, the over-representation comes from a place of historical abuse, residential schools, systemic poverty, it is going to take a very long time to reduce." Further, in forming solutions the process should involve youth, as in the words of another expert: “… young people want to be heard, they want to come to the table to share their ideas, and they usually have really fresh and innovative ideas as well as that life experience.” In sum, interviews corroborated many concepts found in the literature, but also offer distinct insights on experiences of youth of incarcerated parents in BC, and innovative policy solutions.

**Youth Interviews**

Youth interviews were planned as an integral component of this study, and the methodology offered the opportunity to build knowledge by featuring youth in policy research. Throughout the process it became apparent that youth want to share, but with people that they trust. The importance of relationship-building is a key lesson in this study.

**Relationship Building**

Relationship-building became key in this research, with both service providers and youth. Service providers are busy, and researcher flexibility and sensitivity to internal deadlines is important. Regarding youth, it can be difficult to gain participation without personal connection. The study was shared through youth workers for dissemination, but this route lacks the possibility of building direct rapport between youth and the researcher. Without having a face and personality to put to the name, youth may interpret the researcher as intimidating, unrelatable, or akin to other professionals who may have asked for their stories insensitively before. The youth and a youth coordinator later invited the researcher to outings for non-research purposes. This provided some youth a chance to
meet the researcher, and also allowed the researcher to understand the importance of developing a long-term link with this population. Much more relationship-building and trust is required, which may take multiple months to achieve and exceeded research time constraints. It is ideal to work with potential participants on a long-term basis, volunteering with an organization and building trust over the period of several months. It is recommended to give back to youth and organizations in a meaningful and commensurate way, such as by sharing the research in a practical format, and serving as a trustworthy and supportive person in that environment.

YPAR

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) was the preliminary method identified during the planning stages of this study for engaging with impacted youth, but the methodology was amended due to concerns of time and participant privacy. Despite the constraints, YPAR methodology is highly recommended going forward because its main purpose is to empower, give voice, and improve the wellbeing of youth participants through action (Institute of Families, 2015). In this methodology youth and researchers work together, and share ownership of the design, implementation, and analysis the data (Institute of Families, 2015). In the preliminary planning of this study youth were envisioned to interview one another. Not only does this methodology foster skill and social development in youth, but it also nurtures connection and relationships of trust. YPAR could be a means for promoting the development of protective factors and resilience in youth, in addition to collecting, analysing, and presenting research data.
Chapter 6. Policy Options

The following nine policy options were identified as promising in the background and literature review (Chapters 2-3), and strongly align with the direction and opinions expressed by expert interview participants (Chapter 5).

Option 1: Integrated Approach Enhancements

An integrated approach works to better connect or harmonize the work of different agencies. The specific goal is to improve early identification of vulnerable children and families, assess what services they need, and confirm that they receive services in an appropriate format (Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare, 2010).

1.1 Increase Youth Empowerment through Consultation and Engagement

Powerlessness is often a constant in the lives of impacted children with justice-involved parents. This study conceptualizes consultation and engagement as opportunities for youth to have meaningful participation in both policy and care decisions impacting their lives. This option recognizes the importance of working authentically with marginalized populations, and holding self-expressed experiences and needs central in the policy process. In addition to strengthening protocols to ensure that youth have a strong say in decisions made about their wellbeing and future by staff, it is also advisable to create a mechanism, such as an advisory committee, to provide opportunity for direct engagement in policy development.

1.2 Integrate Information Collection and Sharing Protocols

Agencies do not comprehensively collect, collate, or share information on children of incarcerated parents, rendering it difficult to ensure that all impacted children are offered appropriate supports. This option is to integrate the information collection and sharing protocols among the various ministries and departments involved in the provision of services and support for youth of incarcerated parents. This begins from the point of parental arrest or justice-involvement, involves building seamless linkages between the different points in continuum of care, and creating a database with information on impacted
youth for appropriate staff to access. The key idea is to reach all impacted children quickly, and to ensure that policy is evidence-driven (Larson & Swanson, 2008).

1.3 Promote Child Rights Advocacy at National and Provincial Levels

Canada does not have a national Child Rights Advocate, and provincially the Representative for Children and Youth does not have a dedicated portfolio on children of incarcerated parents. This study conceptualises a Child Rights Advocate as a non-partisan and independent government actor providing oversight to child welfare systems on a nationwide basis, and recommendations to improve it. A position could be created at the national level for the benefit of all at-risk children and youth. At both the federal and provincial level, with the Representative for Children and Youth (RYCBC), the specific issue of youth with incarcerated can be integrated by adopting a portfolio on the population. Advocates are able to oversee issues relating to children with incarcerated parents, including acting as an advocate by representing their best interests in the development and reformation of policies and practices affecting them.

1.4 Support the Economic and Social Wellbeing of Families

The prevalence of incarceration is linked to histories of marginalization in Canada, including economic and social marginalization. This option is an acknowledgement of those roots, and commitment to addressing the issue through proactive structural change. Improving the provision of education, health, housing, income and employment assistance, as well as opportunities for families with the purpose of addressing marginalization, may build protective factors and help reduce the incidence of family disruption. This is a more diffuse path, requiring multiple interventions to help buffer families, and sustained effort over time. Despite its complexity, it may be the most important option to holistically and proactively promote child wellbeing.

Option 2. Education-Centred Supports

The UN (2011) identifies schools as a key place for supporting children who experience parental incarceration. Nearly all children attend schools, and educational environments present a setting with opportunities to access and support children in need, including those healing from trauma (Robertson, 2011; Crenshaw, 2013).
2.1 Support Youth Peer-Mentoring Programs

The literature highly recommends mentoring programs for children of incarcerated parents (e.g., Laakso & Nygaard, 2012; Shlafer et al., 2009). Mentoring programs are also widely modelled in other jurisdictions, particularly in the United States. Authors generally discuss mentoring with adult mentors in mind; however, youth mentorship provides an additional promising option. This option is to provide resources to youth peer mentoring programs where youth assist fellow youth in school venues. Authors such as Hanlon et al. (2006), recognize that mentoring is a stabilizing influence for children by providing access to adults who possess time, motivation, and energy to devote to their development. Older youth peers or young adults with the experience of having an incarcerated parent may be well-suited to providing mentorship support, as they may better understand the participant’s worldview and pathways of healing.

2.2 Provide Training and Promote Awareness among Educators

Teachers may have daily contact with impacted youth, and the opportunity to positively support youth and connect them to services. However, teachers may not receive training on this issue, and lack tools to assist impacted youth most effectively. This option is to introduce training and protocols for educational staff (e.g., teachers, principals) on the presence of impacted youth, and how to best support them. The general and specific knowledge of parental incarceration held by schools improves a school’s ability to respond appropriately to impacted students (McCrickard & Flynn, 2015). The province should also update training for youth-serving professionals about the nature and scope of resilience and its influence on positive outcomes for at-risk youth (LaMoine, 2014).

Option 3. Corrections-Centred Supports

The following options centre on improvements for the correctional system to better support the wellbeing and outcomes of impacted youth. For youth who wish to maintain or initiate contact with an incarcerated parent, this option is timely and significant.

3.1 Enhance Visitation Environment and Parent-Child Programs

Visitation helps foster a relationship with incarcerated parents, which is a protective factor in the lives of youth. Not all youth may want to maintain or initiate in-person contact
with incarcerated parents, but the government must enhance the opportunity and benefits for those who do. Visitation environments can be improved, in particular visit times (e.g., not conflicting with school hours), the comfort of visit spaces (e.g., youth-friendly visiting spaces), provide visit coaching by staff, travel subsidy to the institution, and regular training for corrections staff on facilitating parent-child visitation. Parent-child programming during visits can also be offered as a constructive bonding opportunity.

3.2 Improve Provision of Supplemental Communication Services

Communication methods allowing youth to attain or maintain contact with incarcerated parents also have room for improvement. Methods currently include letter writing, phone calls, and in some cases video conferencing. The option of improving remote communication should be made cognisant that it should not replace face-to-face visitation, and assistance in attaining it, for youth who prefer that option. Youth may wish to make use of both visitation and remote communications. The government can update communication methods to improve the adaptation and use of current technology (such as secure social media), and regularly update training for staff to facilitate this service.

Option 4. Justice-Centred Option

The justice system also presents opportunity for improvement, as this is a key mechanism in separation of parent and child, despite not all separation being necessary.

4.1 Account for the Best Interests of Children during Sentencing

It may be beneficial to progress towards a justice system that names children of incarcerated parents as a group for inclusion in sentencing considerations (Robertson, 2012). Courts should identify whether offenders have dependent children and consider the impact of potential sentences on children (Robertson, 2012). With this consideration courts should prioritize sentences that are least damaging to the child, which are generally non-custodial, community sentences. Child impact statements or assessments are a practical measure to help judges consider the best interests of the child when sentencing, and children identify this method as ideal in prior research (Loureiro, 2010). This is tenable given that the majority of crimes are non-violent, and offenders may be better rehabilitated with counselling and treatment in the community instead of incarceration.
Chapter 7. Policy Criteria

Supporting Protective Factors and Resilience

This chapter provides a criteria and measures matrix, which guides the analysis of policy options to address the research question. Themes common in the literature and expert interviews inform the content of the policy matrix. For each objective below, the intention is to focus on maximizing and supporting protective factors and resilience among impacted youth. Objectives are selected with the goal of building assets, and not focusing on deficits in children (Goldstein & Brooks, 2013). It is increasingly agreed that society must identify and harness strengths and shape resilient qualities, since a resilient character, the ability to cope with and overcome adversity, is essential for all children to develop (Goldstein & Brooks, 2013). The timing of interventions is important too, which is why adolescence is an important developmental phase for providing assistance, activating positive cascading effects to enhance multiple areas of functioning (Wright, Masten, & Narayan, 2013). Due to the centrality of child development in this topic, development is weighted more heavily in analysis than other primary and management objectives.

Table 1. Societal Objectives Weighting Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Societal Objective</th>
<th>Weight (importance)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 = high, 2 = moderate, 1 = low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity &amp; Fairness</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation &amp; Consultation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection &amp; Security</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder Reaction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 attaches weight to each overarching societal objective relevant to the policy problem, establishing a ranking of importance for analysis. Table 2 details the societal objectives, policy objectives specific to improving lives of children with incarcerated parents, criteria of what is required to show movement on the policy problem, and measures that illustrate change on the policy problem.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Societal Objective</th>
<th>Policy Objective</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary Objectives</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Development</strong></td>
<td>Bolster protective factors of personal, academic, and professional development among children.</td>
<td>Change in personal development. Change in level of educational and professional attainment.</td>
<td>Proportion of positive written assessments. Number of children finishing high school and pursuing post-secondary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Equity &amp; Fairness</strong></td>
<td>1.1 Services/supports available to all children at the point of parental arrest.</td>
<td>Change in number of children offered services/supports.</td>
<td>Proportion of children offered immediate services/supports.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2 Services/supports culturally appropriate for children/families of incarcerated parents.</td>
<td>Change in the cultural appropriateness of services/supports.</td>
<td>Number of services/protocols that are culturally appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.3 Child rights ensured for all impacted children.</td>
<td>Change in the degree child rights policy is met.</td>
<td>Number of children able to fully exercise child rights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participation &amp; Consultation</strong></td>
<td>Maximize consultation of children concerning services/supports &amp; decisions.</td>
<td>Change in the number of children that feel their needs are taken into account.</td>
<td>Proportion of children consulted in decision-making. High child approval of consultation process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Protection &amp; Security</strong></td>
<td>Maximize protective factors of security among children.</td>
<td>Change in the number of children who feel financial, emotional, physical insecurity.</td>
<td>Number of children who report feeling secure in assessments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Government Management Objectives</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Efficiency</strong></td>
<td>Improve data collection and sharing to help deliver services/supports.</td>
<td>Degree of data collation, collection, and sharing that informs how to target services.</td>
<td>Extent of improved service efficiency through improved data collection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stakeholder Reaction</strong></td>
<td>Maximize positive stakeholder reaction to policy changes.</td>
<td>Change in stakeholder opinion.</td>
<td>Number of stakeholders who are consulted on policy changes. High stakeholder satisfaction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Alignment with UN Convention on The Rights of The Child

Table 2 aligns with the UN CRC (1990) and DGD on Children of Incarcerated Parents (2011) (Appendix A), which includes ensuring the rights of children starting at parental arrest, and allowing children to maintain regular contact with parents through visitation and communications technology. Further, countries should account for the views of children in decisions affecting them, collect and share information among agencies to improve service provision, and guarantee that professionals receive proper training.

Alignment with MCFD Youth Policy Framework

Table 2 also aligns with MCFD’s expected outcomes provided in the Youth Policy Framework (2000). Outcomes include meeting youth’s basic needs for survival, education, and caring relationships with adults. Further objectives include meeting the developmental challenges of adolescents, successful transitions to adulthood, and increased self-reliance and self-sufficiency (MCFD, 2000). Supports to achieve these outcomes should build community assets to aid the development of youth, address the needs of youth in an environmental context, support family and social connections, and help youth develop a sense of control over their lives (MCFD, 2000).

1. Development

Increase innate, academic, and professional development of children/youth

Development in this context refers to the goal of increasing both the innate capabilities of youth (Nussbaum, 2000) and the more easily measurable academic and professional achievements of children with incarcerated parents. As seen in the literature, children may experience personal development and academic struggles, which negatively impact both short and long-term wellbeing (Dallaire, 2010). The literature also identifies education as a possible source of building resilience (Adalist-Estrin, 2006). The criteria of change identified in the matrix is an increase in personal, educational, and professional development. The measurement of this objective is the proportion of positive case worker assessments noting development, and the number of children finishing high school and pursuing post-secondary education. Youth academic and professional performance can be tracked by following up with children through casefiles and collating findings.
2. Equity & Fairness

2.1 Services/supports made available to all children at the point of a parent becoming incarcerated.

The first criteria listed under equity and fairness refers to the services and supports made available to all children at the point of a parent becoming justice-involved. The literature identifies this as a challenge, since children may not automatically be approached with offers of assistance from service providers (McCormick et al., 2014). Some children may benefit with help, but not receive consideration due to a lack of horizontal sector protocols. The criteria of this objective is a positive change in the number of children who receive offers of supports, and the success of this objective is the proportion of children who receive immediate supports. Measurement is attained through collating a list of children of incarcerated parents, and noting when each child receives contact, the services and supports on offer, and the outcome (i.e., child receives services).

2.2 Services/supports are culturally appropriate for all children/families of incarcerated parents.

The second criteria under equity and fairness refers to the cultural appropriateness of supports for children of incarcerated parents. A large number of impacted children may have Aboriginal identity, as indicated by the incarceration trends in Canada (see Chapter 2. Background). The literature describes the historical treatment of Aboriginal peoples, and importance of considering the appropriateness of services and supports (e.g., Corrado et al., 2014). The success of this objective is a positive change in the number of culturally appropriate services provided (e.g., drawing on local traditional knowledge), and the measure is the proportion of services that are culturally appropriate.

2.3 Ensure child rights for all children of incarcerated parents.

The third criteria under equity and fairness relates to the success of policy options in promoting children’s rights, at international, national, and provincial levels. The policy objective is for all children to enjoy the rights that are due to them, and the criteria is the change in degree that domestic policy ensures these rights. The measure is the number of children fully able to exercise their rights and live comparable lives to other children, such as seeing their parents often and participating in decisions on their future.
3. Participation & Consultation

Maximize consultation of children concerning services/supports and protocol decisions.

Participation and consultation in this context refers to the meaningful involvement of children concerning services and supports, and protocol decisions. The UN CRC identifies that children should have a say in the decisions impacting their lives (UN, 1990). Current protocols may not fully consider the wishes of children in decision-making concerning their future, as well as the services and supports that are offered. The success of this objective is the positive change in number of children that feel their needs and opinions are meaningfully taken into account. This objective is measured through the proportion of children service providers consult concerning decisions made about them, child satisfaction with the process, and recorded through case worker and policy development documentation.

4. Protection & Security

Maximize feelings of security among children with incarcerated parents.

Protection and security refers to the personal security of children with incarcerated parents. The literature identifies that impacted children are more likely to experience destabilised lives (PHO, 2013). The success of this criterion is a positive change in the number of children who feel financial, emotional, and physical security. Measuring the number of children who feel secure can be accomplished by recording child security ratings, and collating case worker documentation.

5. Government Efficiency

Improve data collection and sharing to help deliver services/supports.

Government efficiency refers to improving data collection and sharing data with relevant actors to help deliver services and supports. The literature identifies that data is currently not fully collected or collated, and not shared between agencies (McCormick et al., 2014). Improving the record of data collation, collection, and sharing will better inform how to target services, and thus improve efficiency. The extent of service efficiency improvements can be measured with a comparison of the reactivity of service
supports in meeting the needs of children (i.e., immediate support upon arrest of a parent), with the amount of time it took before services were offered before.

6. **Stakeholder Reaction**

Maximize **positive stakeholder reaction to policy changes**.

Stakeholder reaction refers to stakeholder response to policy changes, namely members of the public such as advocates, non-profits, and families. Stakeholders were identified in background research, and in interview discussion most experts from various organizations indicate that the government can improve policy for this population. The success of this objective is the number of stakeholders engaged, and a positive change in stakeholder opinion of policy response. This can be measured through consultation with stakeholders when developing and implementing policy changes, and follow-up after enacting policy changes.
Chapter 8. Policy Evaluation

This section presents four portfolio options that emerge as most promising and pertinent given the policy problem, weighted criteria and measures, and interview results. These options are: an integrated response, education-centred supports, corrections-centred supports, and justice-centred change. Table 3 provides a policy ranking matrix (following page). Portfolios consist of individual policies that are complementary of each other, and each piece may address certain societal criteria in a more pronounced way. Sub-options of each portfolio are selectable in isolation, although the intention is to present a complete portfolio that will improve the wellbeing of children of incarcerated parents holistically. In forming these options, the focus is on youth (ages 14 to 18); however, options may be relevant to younger children as well.

Strengths-Based Approach: Protective Factors and Resilience

The following options fall under a positive youth development (PYD) framework. Options are strength-based approaches (rather than focusing on deficits), involve multiple agents (e.g., multiple ministerial jurisdictions), focus on social relationships, and facilitate positive development in the everyday and long-term (Sesma et al., 2013). Effective programs for youth at-risk are child-centred and based upon the establishment of relationships with caring and respectful adults, who build trust (Goldstein & Brooks, 2013). Connections to people and interests are the key components in resilient processes (Goldstein & Brooks, 2013).

For these policy options the intent is not to focus on the symptoms of maladaptation, but to devote energy to proactively supporting strengths, positive adaptation, and development. Following an ecological approach, there are interventions that can maintain or further the quality of resilient structures for youth in their environments, for example through family, schools, or community programs (LeMoine, 2014; Lerner et al., 2013).
Table 3. Policy Option Ranking Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrated Approach</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Consultation</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Data</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Advocacy</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Family Wellbeing</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Approach</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Mentoring</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Training</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrections Approach</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Visitation</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Communication</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice Approach</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Sentencing</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 ranks portfolio options using the child-centered criteria presented in Chapter 7. For each option a rank is provided; high denotes that an option fully meets the criteria, medium indicates that an option meets the criteria in part, and low specifies that an option meets the criteria indirectly. Highlighted rankings indicate that an option meets the criteria most strongly. Table 4 provides concrete measures for each ranking category.

Table 4. Ranking Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Option</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>&gt;90% youth attain development goals</td>
<td>&gt;70% youth attain development goals</td>
<td>Indirect benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity &amp; Fairness</td>
<td>&gt;90% youth provided appropriate services immediately</td>
<td>&gt;70% youth provided appropriate services immediately</td>
<td>Indirect benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation &amp; Consultation</td>
<td>&gt;90% youth provided consultation opportunities</td>
<td>&gt;70% youth provided consultation opportunities</td>
<td>Indirect benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection &amp; Security</td>
<td>&gt;90% youth feel greater personal security</td>
<td>&gt;70% youth feel greater personal security</td>
<td>Indirect benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>&gt;90% new data collection/sharing targets met</td>
<td>&gt;70% new data collection/sharing targets met</td>
<td>Indirect benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder Response</td>
<td>&gt;90% stakeholder approval rate</td>
<td>&gt;70% stakeholder approval rate</td>
<td>Indirect benefits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Option 1: “Integrated Approach” Enhancements**

**1.1 Increase Youth Empowerment through Consultation and Engagement**

**Option:** Improve and increase opportunities for youth consultation and engagement in policy decisions impacting them.

**Alignment with interview findings:**

Experts in the field of practice indicate that consultation and engagement is a desirable path forward in supporting youth with incarcerated parents. Experts who work most closely with impacted youth note the capacity, interest, and investment of youth in participating in such initiatives if made available. In the words of one expert: “...young people want to be heard, they want to come to the table to share their ideas, and they usually have really fresh and innovative ideas as well as that life experience.” Moreover, the importance of youth involvement in decision making was also affirmed when seeking to conduct youth interviews for this study.

**Alignment with policy frameworks:**

Internationally, the UN DGD (2011) requires governments to respect the views of the child, accounting for children’s views in decisions affecting them. Provincially, MCFD’s (2000) Youth Policy Framework recommends a youth-centred approach that acknowledges youth have the capacity to understand their environment and have control over their health and wellbeing. It encourages youth to use their strengths and abilities to direct their own future (MCFD, 2000). The framework further states that staff should provide the opportunity for youth to participate in program planning, development, and evaluation of youth services (2000).
Description: Increase Youth Empowerment through Consultation and Engagement

Increasing empowerment through consultation and engagement is important for consideration, since “powerlessness is a constant in the lives” of children and families involved in the justice system (Adalist-Estrin, 2006, p. 9). This option recognizes the importance of working meaningfully with marginalized populations, and making self-expressed experiences and needs central in the policy process. Agencies should provide youth the opportunity to have greater influence over decision-making aspects in their lives. In addition to strengthening protocols to ensure that children have a strong say in decisions made about their future, it is also advisable to create an advisory council mechanism for children, youth, and families to engage directly with key provincial committees that develop policy and implement service delivery.

Davidson, Wiens and Anderson (2010) present a similar recommendation on strengthening engagement for child and youth mental health in BC. The author notes that families are exceptionally positioned with personal experiences and impetus to contribute through collaboration with service providers, policy makers, and other families (Davidson et al., 2010). This mechanism acknowledges the ideas and opinions of youth, and builds protective factors of self-esteem and confidence.

A successful model for youth engagement is found with the Federation of BC Youth in Care Network (FBCYICN). FBCYICN (2015a) is a youth-driven non-profit offering an array of supports to youth, and the opportunity to engage in policy discussions. Steering Committee meetings are held tri-annually for youth from throughout the province, and present the opportunity for youth to provide input and feedback to organizations including MCFD (FBCYICN, 2015b). The meetings also provide workshops, activities, and networking with other youth and supportive adults (FBCYICN, 2015b). It may be beneficial to develop a similar steering group inviting all impacted youth of incarcerated parents to participate (including those who are not in care), to insure inclusivity of the specific experiences, perspectives, and needs of this group.

The inclusion of children impacted by parental incarceration in decisions may promote greater awareness and formal recognition of impacted children as a vulnerable group in need of support (Flynn et al., 2015). Empowering youth to define outcomes, set
goals, and make decisions builds resiliency by developing youth self-efficacy (Doll, 2013; LeMoine, 2014).

**Policy Analysis: Increase Youth Empowerment through Consultation and Engagement**

For policy options to be successful they must fit with the target individual’s understanding of how to meet their own needs and environmental demands (Lerner et al., 2013), which means engaging youth is intrinsically important in this process. This option is distinguished by offering a significant impact on youth participation and consultation. It does so by promoting and amplifying the voice of impacted youth, and seeking to provide them greater say in decisions otherwise made on their behalf. This option will have a moderate to high impact on development, by building protective factors and life skills for intrinsic personal development, and better preparing youth for academic and professional success. Increasing youth empowerment will have high impacts on equity and fairness, by ensuring that services and supports are responsive and tailored to various experiences in the population. This option will also have a moderate impact on improving the efficiency of government response, by more effectively addressing the expressed needs of youth. This option will increase feelings of security if children thereby feel more control over decisions in their lives and environment. Lastly, it will have favourable stakeholder reaction, as this is a change requested by stakeholders in interview data as well as by the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children (CCRC, 2010).

This option must be implemented in a mindful way, to prevent youth from being invited to share personal stories in a token fashion with no actual bearing on decisions. Youth participation must be well structured, and advocates should be present to ensure youth needs are met. Otherwise, there may be a trade-off with protection and security among youth involved, if they feel like they were engaged in bad faith. Youth input should be highly weighted in decision-making. It is advisable to look closely at FBCYICN’s model and best practices in appropriately developing and implementing this option.
1.2 Integrate Information Collection and Sharing Protocols

Option: Integrate information collection and sharing protocols horizontally among the various ministries and departments involved in the provision of services and support for youth of incarcerated parents.

Alignment with interview findings:

A predominant finding in expert interviews is the significant data gap pertaining to this population, and the lack of data sharing. This can lead to agencies not knowing when a child is at-risk as there is a lack of protocols, or there are policies in place preventing information from being shared. Experts provide guidance on what form this option can take, as stated by one professional in the field: "What you really need is a kind of network, or a secure database that can hold this information; the nature of these individuals, the contact with the different ministries, and the experiences of support being provided, that triggers interventions when they are essentially going to be at-risk again, like when their parent is going to be released."

Alignment with existing policy frameworks:

Internationally, this option aligns with the UN DGD (2011) which recommends that states should collect and maintain records of children of incarcerated parents, and make information available to help with the provision of support. Provincially, this option aligns with MCFD’s (2000) Youth Policy Framework which recommends integrated planning and service delivery. Further, MCFD and Federation of Community Social Services of BC (Federation) (2012) specifically identify the need for inter-ministry coordination and connections; improving communications and information sharing processes to ensure that individuals providing care and treatment are knowledgeable about the child’s needs, goals, plans, relationships, and desired outcomes (MCFD, 2012).

Description: Integrate Information Collection and Sharing Protocols

An integrated approach is intended to better connect or harmonize the work of different agencies, with the specific goal of improving early identification of vulnerable youth and families, assessing what services they need, and confirming that they receive
them in the appropriate form (Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare, 2010). Currently, data collection at the federal and provincial levels is incomplete pertaining to impacted children. If collected, this information is not collated, and may not be shared with appropriate actors working to help (McCormick et al., 2014). Representatives of local non-profits note that information sharing with appropriate actors would be helpful in allowing responses that are more effective for youth (Legislative Assembly of BC, 2006).

Abram and Linhorst (2007) and Burns et al., (2007) note that impacted children interact with several systems that may have major barriers in collecting and sharing information about the population. The authors explain that child-oriented services do not ask about incarceration, and adult-oriented services do not ask about children (Abram & Linhorst, 2007). Flynn et al. (2015) argue that for services to be effective they must inquire about children, standardise and centralise child data for appropriate agencies to access, to ensure a common knowledge base (Flynn et al., 2015). The Think Family framework in the UK is an example of successfully applying this call for action (Puddefoot & Foster, 2007). In this framework cross-organizational training is done to ensure staff consider family and children, initiate information sharing to identify at-risk individuals, and prioritise the wellbeing of children within family environments (Puddefoot & Foster, 2007).

It is possible to begin collecting and sharing information from the point of arrest. Australian Victoria Police have a protocol developed with Child Protection on how to respond to children of individuals undergoing arrest or in custody (Department of Human Services, 2012). The protocol requires officers to ask about children, and document these interactions for information sharing and consistency (Flynn et al., 2015). The police use SupportLink, a single gateway to make referrals upon contact and enter into a database (SupportLink, 2013). The database allows actors in the continuum of care to keep a complete file and ensure that children are receiving comprehensive support.

There is precedent in Canada of jurisdictions moving towards a more integrated system. Ontario’s Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare (2010) discusses working towards an integrated system across the province, which is able to identify vulnerable children early, assess what services they need, and ensure they receive them.
This is important given the need for collaboration between agencies and need for consistency in service.

**Policy Analysis: Integrate Information Collection and Sharing Protocols**

Ensuring the collection and sharing of data promotes the wellbeing of impacted youth, by helping to ensure they receive required assistance early and comprehensively. This option will have significant impacts on equity and fairness, by ensuring that services and supports are made available to all children at the point of parental justice-involvement. This option will also have a high impact on improving the efficiency of government response, by effectively alerting agents to the needs of impacted children early on. It will have a moderate to high impact on promoting the development of children, by ensuring the right agencies are alerted and aware of who needs assistance. That said, creating, funding, and expanding services is also required to more fully improve youth development. This option presents a positive impact on improving liberty among impacted children, when agencies consult youth in a meaningful way as discussed previously. This option will increase feelings of security when service providers contact children quickly, and offer clear and substantial options. It will have favourable stakeholder reaction, as this is a change stakeholders request in interview data, and is requested by CCRC (2010).

This option has trade-offs with the individual privacy of children, and it is essential to carefully plan the design of information collection and sharing mechanisms. Examining other jurisdictions that have implemented this option will be helpful in mitigating risks to privacy, and implementing best practices. This option requires institutional change, and it is advisable to train and adequately support the agents who will carry out the work to temper principal-agent issues. Supporting staff with change-management principles is essential, as well as being clear and transparent with clients about changes. Enhancements to youth engagement (Option 1.1) may amplify the effects of this option.

**1.3 Promote Child Rights Advocacy at National and Provincial Levels**

**Option:** Create a national child rights advocate position and provincial portfolio for impacted children and families of incarcerated individuals.
Alignment with interview findings:

Experts discuss the difficulty in achieving change, and solutions to command greater attention and action for this population. Advocacy in two senses was recommended, the first is more prevalent in interviews; grass-roots advocacy by non-profits directed at the public and/or decision-makers. The second is the work that official advocates and investigators primarily do, focusing energy on: “decision makers that can make a difference in the lives of the men, women, and children directly affected.”

Alignment with policy frameworks:

Internationally, the UN (2011) recommends that governments not only take action, but account for the rights of children. Provincially, MCFD (2000) states that ongoing service review and evaluation goes in hand with improvements in service delivery and integration. CCRC (2010) calls for a National Advocate for Children to ensure policies account for the rights of children, and close gaps by working with provincial advocates.

Description: Promote Child Rights Advocacy at National and Provincial Levels

This option conceptualizes a Child Rights Advocate as a non-partisan and independent government actor providing oversight to child welfare systems, and recommendations for improvement. There is room to (1) create a position at the national level for all at-risk children, and (2) to integrate the issue of youth with incarcerated parents at the provincial level with RYCBC through adoption of a portfolio on the population.

A National Child Rights Advocate will promote an integrated and evidence-based approach to reducing risk and increasing resilience among children with incarcerated parents. This position will help represent their best interests in the development and reformation of policies and practices affecting them. The national advocate would be responsible for a range of issues, similar to the responsibilities of the provincial office in BC. A portfolio on incarcerated youth at the provincial level will also mean greater attention, evaluation, and advocacy to legislature on behalf of this population.
Other jurisdictions have national commissioners or advocates, such as Scotland. The Children and Young People’s Commissioner of Scotland (CYPCS) is the national child and youth advocate whose portfolio is inclusive of youth with incarcerated parents. Children and youth select the advocate and are invited to join the Commissioner’s Team of young people (CYPCS, 2015b). The Commissioner's office produces reports highlighting the need to ensure adequate and timely support, and to raise the profile of impacted children (CYPCS, 2015b). The work of advocates lead movement towards positive changes for youth in Scotland, for example a proposal was brought to the legislature for the courts to regard the impact of parental custody on the welfare of offender’s children, and to ensure children receive support (Scottish Parliament, 2015).

**Policy Analysis: Promote Child Rights Advocacy at National & Provincial Levels**

This option presents similar benefits to 1.1 (engagement) and 1.2 (data collection/sharing), and offers high benefits to equity and fairness by evaluating and advocating for interventions to provide a consistent level of care and opportunities for all impacted children. This option will improve youth development, when the work of an advocate leads to service and program changes to help support impacted youth. This option may also help push for supports that are culturally appropriate for youth. An official advocate will have a high impact on participation and consultation, when youth engagement is enmeshed as part of its model. The effective operation of a national advocate may maximize feelings of security among impacted children, when its operation leads to positive changes through policy. A national advocate will increase government efficiency by linking and sharing research, findings and plans between provinces on this issue. Official advocate work has favourable stakeholder reaction in interview data.

When a national advocate is created and/or a provincial portfolio is adopted, it is important to ensure that youth of incarcerated parents are meaningfully considered as a population for evaluation and action. This is a hidden population, with little data available, and as a result it is not high on the agenda, and may not be provided with much weight. Further, the importance of collecting data, and amplifying the voices of youth has relevance with this option. While it is useful to have official advocates working on this topic, this should not diminish the importance of youth engagement as well.
1.4 Support the Economic and Social Wellbeing of Families

Option: Buffer families from risk by strengthening economic and social supports

Alignment with interview findings:

Structural inequities are a common thread in expert interviews, who stress the importance of attending to roots of parental separation by incarceration: marginalization and oppression. Experts discussed the material (economic) and social (e.g., racism, cultural marginalization) inequities that may take generations to address. As explained by one professional in the field: “…it is an intergenerational issue of racism, and historical abuses, and attempts of cultural genocide. It is going to take generations to resolve that.” The expert added: “…we could appreciably reduce the number of children brought in to care if appropriate family and community supports were put in place.”

Alignment with policy framework:

Internationally, the UN CRC (1990) recommends that states take measures to assist parents/caregivers to realize the conditions for child development, in the form of material assistance and support programs. Further, states should also show respect for the child’s parents, cultural identity, and language and values. Provincially, MCFD’s (2000) Youth Policy Framework recommends effective youth services respect culture and beliefs, and should build on and preserve kinship and cultural identity. Families are the preferred living environment, and service providers should work with the local community to strengthen the ability of youth and families to provide for themselves.

Description: Support the Economic and Social Wellbeing of Families

Literature and interviews identify that the prevalence of incarceration is linked to economic and social marginalization in Canada. This option entails improving the provision of education, health, housing, income and employment assistance and opportunities to families, to start addressing marginalization and to buffer families from risks (Corrado & Cohen, 2011). Some opportunities are currently available, but increases can be made to monetary amounts and eligibility to help buffer families in need. Nurse-Family Partnership parent training is also a strong intervention (NFP) that should be
expanded to build tools and resources among families (Gov. BC, 2015). By enhancing levels of support, it is possible to build protective factors and reduce the intergenerational transmission of family disruption, and other social indicators of inequality such as poverty, mental illness, abuse, and community violence (Corrado et al., 2014). This option may present the indispensable protective factor of overall household stability and security (Corrado et al., 2014).

One way to manifest this option is by ensuring that families have necessary economic support and emergency funds available to overcome difficulties associated with incarceration of a parent, such as loss of income or inhibited capacity to work (SUPERU, 2015). A program option is available in Scotland, where relatives caring for children of incarcerated parents can receive specialized kinship care allowance at the levels available to foster parents (Families Outside, 2012). In providing this support it is important to be cognisant of the layered challenges and oppressions that families may experience. Children and families with a high propensity for experiencing incarceration may have many other disadvantages (Turney & Wildeman, 2015). Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit (SUPERU) a social policy office in New Zealand, discusses evidence that some Maori families experience financial strain but do not access benefits due to mistrust in government agencies, for example fearing that their children may be removed from them (SUPERU, 2015). This may also be the case in Canada due to the heavily stigmatized nature of incarceration, and affected youth and families may seek to keep their experiences hidden from others.

It is also critical that biological families and foster families of children with incarcerated parents receive training and resources to respond to distinct needs (Corrado et al., 2014). Biological parents may have lacked positive parent modeling in their own formative years, and may benefit from targeted NFP training and interventions to learn how to nurture children and avoid antisocial behaviour and activity (personal interview). Caregivers may have limited resources and struggle to address the emotional, psychological, and financial needs of children, and may benefit from services and supports (Allard, 2012; Merenstein, 2011). Caregiver training is advised, since children are influenced by caregiver’s views, and benefit from healthy communication and discussion of incarceration rather than stigma and shame (Manby et al., 2015; Miller et al., 2013).
An additional integral way to buffer families is by enshrining the importance and respect of culture, and delivering services in a culturally appropriate manner. Wright, Masten and Narayan (2013) note that cultural traditions, religious rituals, and community support provide a variety of protective functions and can function to protect children and families. Culture can inform the best form and function of interventions (Wright et al., 2013). MCFD and Federation of Community Social Services (2012) recommend that the government provide services through Aboriginal agencies, staff, and communities, informed by cultural knowledge. Renewed vigour in meeting these objectives is required, to continue working towards the goal of reducing marginalization.

**Policy Analysis: Support the Economic and Social Wellbeing of Families**

This may be the most important option for promoting the wellbeing of children in a holistic and proactive way. This option provides great benefits for equity and fairness by ensuring culturally appropriate programs, economic support, and helping to address multiple and overlapping disadvantages. It provides benefits to development by building protective factors such as greater security and stability in home and community environments. Measures to help buffer families and counter marginalization offer benefits of participation and consultation dependent on consulting and engaging youth on proposed interventions. This option provides high benefits to protection and security by maximizing protective factors and feelings of personal and financial security. It provides benefits to government efficiency by proactively assisting families and helping to interrupt intergenerational oppression. This option presents positive stakeholder reaction, as indicated in expert interview data.

This option requires engagement and collaboration to fully develop, especially from First Nations communities. It will require greater state resources, with unclear efficiency of outcomes, which may make it less apparent as an option. It will not solve all familial issues, and improving the material and social wellbeing of families will take time. Countering marginalization will take generations; to meaningfully address historical and incremental harms much change is needed.
Option 2. Education-Centred Supports

2.1 Support Youth Peer-Mentoring Programs

Option: Create and/or support peer mentoring program supports to assist impacted youth.

Alignment with interview findings:

Expert interviews note the centrality of mentoring programs as a tool of support for impacted youth. This is tied to the presence of a caring and trustworthy adult who seeks to understand and support the youth. A common opinion among experts is the importance of: “involvement of [mentoring] agencies that can assign somebody to mentor that youth, either initially or throughout the duration of their parent’s incarceration. It might also be helpful to have [youth] connect to another adolescent who’s gone through this.”

Alignment with policy framework:

Internationally, the UN CRC (1990) urges states to ensure the development of a child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential. Provincially, MCFD’s (2000) Youth Policy Framework recommends that effective youth services build not only on family, but also adult relationships. MCFD (2000) also recommends encouraging and supporting youth through social connection to use their strengths and abilities to direct their futures.

Description: Support Youth Peer-Mentoring Programs

Mentoring is a stabilizing influence for impacted at-risk children, as it provides direct access to adults who possess time, motivation and energy to devote to development (Hanlon et al., 2006). Youth peers may also be a positive mentoring source, and commensurate to the benefits of adult mentors. The literature notes the importance of ensuring that all youth have access to at least one secure and predictable relationship with an adult (LeMoine, 2014). Positive modelling is a useful component of mentoring, since antisocial behaviour may be normalized in some children’s environments (SUPERU, 2015). Positive benefits of mentorship include improving: academic performance, social behaviours and communication, peer relationships, and decision-making (Hanlon et al.,
Mentoring programs foster resilience by building competence, confidence, and emotional wellbeing, and access to a concerned adult (Adalist-Estrin, 2006; Laakso & Nygaard, 2012; SUPERU, 2015).

To be successful mentors must understand the participant’s worldview, including children’s perspectives, and the contexts they were formed in (Falk, 2014). Youth who have experienced trauma are self-reparative, and have the ability to heal through unburdening their stories to someone they have built trust with and relate to (Crenshaw, 2013). Mentors should understand children’s interpretation of situations, future expectations, support systems, strengths, and goals (Falk, 2014). Older youth peers or adults who have the experience of being a child of an incarcerated parent may be best suited to providing mentorship support. Youth mentorship provides the ability to connect youth with one-another and serve as a positive source of support and encouragement. Additional elements of success in mentoring relationships include duration (a minimum of 12 months) (MCFD, 2010), and cultural understanding; the program should work in a culturally appropriate way with Aboriginal youth participants. It may also be advisable to offer mentoring to youth up to the age of 25 to reflect the need for guidance and support that extends into early adulthood (Provincial Advocate for Children & Youth, 2012).

Mentoring is available through MCFD, but intended for children in foster care. Kinnections was created with the input of a series of community consultations with young people in and from care (MCFD, 2010). Youth expressed the importance of having a supportive adult available to them to share wisdom, life experience, unconditional support, and encouragement (MCFD, 2010). Kinnections is a strengths-based approach, helping youth build their internal ability and resilience. It may be beneficial to create a mentoring option tailored to the expectations and experiences of children with incarcerated parents, who may not be in government care.

There are dedicated mentoring programs available for youth of incarcerated parents in other jurisdictions. SHINE for Kids in Bathurst, Australia, has an extensive mentoring program for impacted children and provides training and support to mentors (Saunders & McArthur, 2013). FEAT in Toronto, Canada offers a Mentorship Program for children ages 6 to 19 affected by familial justice-involvement (FEAT, 2015). The program
facilitates at-risk youth to develop leadership and mentoring skills, receive one-on-one academic support, and build a positive peer support network (FEAT, 2015).

Policy Analysis: Support Youth Peer-Mentoring Programs

Mentoring offers great benefits to development, and in the case of peer mentoring it offers benefits to both youth mentors and mentees. As shown by FEAT, mentoring increases social skills, life skills, and leadership development, school attendance, and achievement. Mentoring offers benefits to equity and fairness, by helping to ensure that all impacted youth have a positive relationship with an adult or a peer mentor. It also provides benefits to equity and fairness when provided in a culturally appropriate way for Aboriginal children. This option will provide benefits to participation and consultation, when children are consulted on the formation or functioning of the service as was done with Kinnections. It increases feelings of security through having a positive role model for support in youth lives, and life-skill building. Mentoring may improve government efficiency by providing supports proactively, and this option also has stakeholder support.

Mentoring programs do not address all of the issues facing impacted children, but produce positive outcomes that mitigate some of the risks. There is limited literature assessing the efficacy of youth peer-mentorship programs for this population; however, the benefits of adult mentorship are highly promoted. There is interest in developing this program in Greater Vancouver by EFry; financial support is needed to back the expertise, passion, and efforts of actors on the ground.

2.2 Provide Training and Promote Awareness among Educators

Option: Integrate policy regarding training for educational staff (e.g., teachers, principals) on the presence of impacted youth, and how best to support them.

Alignment with interview findings:

The importance of improving awareness and tools in educational institutions is a common recommendation in expert interviews. Experts note that this topic is not part of the curriculum, or acknowledged like other forms of parental separation. In the words of
one professional: “if [the topic] was integrated into the education system, I think it would be a huge source of awareness and reducing the stigma.”

Alignment with policy framework:

The UN (2011) recommends that professionals in the justice system, education, and social services should be trained to appropriately provide needed support to children of incarcerated parents. The MCFD’s (2000) Youth Policy Framework states that the Ministry should work to build community assets at schools, a key social connection.

Description: Provide Training and Promote Awareness among Educators

Lopez and Bhat (2010) note that children spend a great portion of their day in school, and school counsellors, psychologists, teachers, and administrators will benefit from guidance on how to assist students with incarcerated parents effectively. Staff notice the emotional and practical consequences present in the lives of children (Cunningham & Baker, 2003), but a lack of policy direction and resources mean they are able to do little more (Leeson & Morgan, 2014).

McCrickard and Flynn’s (2015) study found that a school’s ability to appropriately respond to impacted students is sharpened by the general and specific knowledge of parental incarceration held by schools. Access to such knowledge is limited by the stigmatised nature of the problem and fragmented service system, but if schools have greater awareness, then positive response can be implemented (McCrickard & Flynn, 2015). Morgan et al. (2013) discuss the importance of developing a school policy available to staff on how impacted children will be supported and the confidential nature of support. They note that a key person within the school should be identified and given responsibility for ensuring protocols are upheld (Morgan et al., 2013).

Roberts and Loucks (2015) identify staff training as the most important intervention that schools can do in relation to impacted children and youth. Without adequate training, teachers may add to child stress through unintended comments or bias (Roberts & Loucks, 2015). Training for educational professionals may focus on issues such as how to discuss incarceration with classes and how to address concerns for students who
approach them (Cunningham & Baker, 2003). In Somerset, England, awareness training about the needs of children affected by parental incarceration is provided by 17 schools participating in the From Learning Partnership. The goal of this training is to promote a greater understanding and response to the population, and for each school to have a staff champion as the point of contact for families (Barnardos, 2014). Similarly, the Osborne Association in New York delivers a training program to teachers and other staff, designed to inform staff about resources, promote understanding, help staff talk sensitively to children about the issue, and provide staff with tools to navigate the system so that they can communicate and involve parents in the child’s education (Roberts & Loucks, 2015).

**Policy Analysis:** Provide Training and Promote Awareness among Educators

Training for educational staff offers elevated benefits to youth development by building ability and awareness among important adults in youth’s education environment. Training for educational staff offers benefits to equity and fairness, as it helps to ensure that impacted youth have a positive relationship with an adult, via educational staff at school. It also provides benefits to equity and fairness when provided in a culturally appropriate way for Aboriginal children. This option provides benefits to participation and consultation when children are consulted on the formation or functioning of the training. Training for educational staff may increase feelings of security by having a positive teacher role model for support in impacted youth lives. It improves government efficiency by providing supports proactively, and it also has stakeholder support.

This option goes a long way in building greater awareness and understanding of the presence and needs of this group. However, it cannot promise to solve stigma for this population, or to necessarily increase the academic achievement of impacted youth. This option has ease of implementation, it is not a major strain on resources, and can be integrated into professional development days for implementation. Training should not be a one-time event, and staff should be regularly refreshed on this topic.
Option 3. Corrections-Centred Supports

3.1 Enhance Visitation Environment and Parent-Child Programs

Option: Improve in-person visitation programs and the visitation environment for youth of incarcerated parents.

Alignment with interview findings:

The importance of face-to-face contact between parents and children is stressed in interviews, and considered an indispensable area to strengthen. Experts note that it is important to not only increase the opportunity of visits, but also the quality of visits. One expert states: “There should be standards, for example extended time on weekends, and a family visiting room that doesn’t look institutionalized. For youth, there should be games, interactive activities… It’s important that parents can do activities with the youth.”

Alignment with policy framework:

The UN DGD (2011) establishes that children have the right to regularly visit parents; visits should be subsidized, and visits should be respectful to child’s dignity, privacy, and schedule. Further, visits should be conducted in a child-friendly environment and for durations conducive to building and maintaining relationships. Additionally, professionals in the justice system, education, and social services should be trained to appropriately provide needed support (UN, 2011). MCFD’s (2000) Youth Policy Framework states that effective youth services build upon family and adult relationships, and youth must be assisted in developing and maintaining attachments to family.

Description: Enhance Visitation Environment and Parent-Child Programs

Improvements to the visiting environment and accessibility are needed. Visiting spaces are uncomfortable, and inappropriate for youth, providing little opportunity for meaningful communication between parent and child. There is opportunity for updating the physical visiting space to be more conducive to family visitation, through aesthetics, games, and books. It is also advisable to enhance visiting hour availability during the evenings, weekends, and statutory holidays when children are able to visit, so that they
do not have to miss school (Withers, 2003). Moreover, it is important to review institution search and security procedures to ensure visiting youth are treated with respect and dignity (Withers, 2003). All those in contact with impacted youth should be trained on how to interact and support visiting youth.

Furthermore, transportation is currently not subsidized for youth traveling to visit incarcerated parents in BC. Non-profit agencies such as EFry and John Howard Society assist families of inmates with transportation for family visits (Cunningham and Baker, 2003). State support for travel costs is needed, particularly for youth who live in locations that are a great distance from incarcerated parents and lack travel support. There is only one federal institution for women in BC, meaning children may find it exceedingly difficult to visit, especially if caregivers are unable to afford the trip or unsupportive of the visit.

Focusing on the quality of interactions is an important goal, in addition to increasing the frequency of visits. The implementation of visitation coaching services for parents, children, and caregivers can help to make visits productive and therapeutic (Beyer et al., 2010). Training with parents and children should be cognisant of gender and the specific needs of each family (Kjellstrand et al., 2012). Additionally, homework clubs are an excellent way for parents to have meaningful visitation and engage in their children’s education. As part of the Parenting Inside Out program, children and parents in prison do homework together on a weekly basis (Roberts & Loucks, 2015). The Learning Together Project at HMP Parc Prison in Wales facilitates incarcerated fathers to follow along with the school curriculum, and then help children with their homework when they come into the prison (Loucks, 2015). Interactive activities and coaching may promote the most benefit from parent-child visits.

Policy Analysis: Enhance Visitation Environment and Parent-Child Programs

Visitation helps foster a relationship with the incarcerated parent, which is a protective factor in the lives of youth. This option offers great developmental benefits by supporting parent-child connections, which have positive effects on other aspects of youth lives emotionally, academically, and professionally. This option has benefits for equity and fairness by providing youth the opportunity to connect in-person with their parents like many other youth in society are afforded. This option has positive benefits for participation
and consultation when youth are consulted on the experience, barriers, and needs regarding visitation, and provided strong opportunity to make choices regarding visitation and its frequency. Enhancing visitation experiences may increase feelings of protection and security among youth by allowing them to establish or maintain relationships with their parents. It increases government efficiency by building protective factors in the lives of youth, and has stakeholder support.

This option is a prime area for intervention, since the need for visitation improvements are visible and tangible, and the importance of in-person parental contact is well documented in the literature (e.g., Beckmeyer & Arditti, 2014). Responsibility for improvement is also clearly delineated, falling to Corrections systems at the provincial and federal levels to improve. It is useful to note that not all children may want to visit their parents, and in some cases it may be damaging to do so; each child’s wishes must be honoured and social workers should be well trained in how to support these decisions. For those who do want visitation, the government must make the experience safe, positive, and supportive.

3.2 Improve Provision of Supplemental Communication Services

Option: Enhance communication methods for youth, as a supplementary option to parental visitation.

Alignment with interview findings:

Improving parent-child communication services is urged in expert interviews, due to the central importance of fostering a parent-child bond. As described by one expert: “Kids need to be connected to their parents in whatever way possible. In-person, if that is possible. And if that’s not, then there needs to be phone calls and letter writing and pictures exchanged.”

Alignment with policy framework:

Internationally, the UN (2011) states that children should have alternative means of communication supplemental to in-person visits through communications technology. Further, the costs of communication should not be prohibitive for children and adults.
MCFD’s (2000) Youth Policy Framework states that when youth are unable to live with their parents, they must be assisted to develop and maintain attachments.

**Description:** Improve Provision of Supplemental Communication Services

Research establishes the benefit of increasing contact between incarcerated parents and children (Blumberg & Griffin, 2013). In the past researchers recommended improving access and procedures for telephone and mail correspondence (Poelmann, Dallaire, Loper, & Shear, 2010). Newer technologies are more interactive and friendly for youth, and governments should now feature, share, and provide them.

Some pilot projects are using modern communication in prison between parents and children (Robertson, 2012). A social media networking website for children and incarcerated parents is in use in Jamaica, which allows children to share updates and photos with parents, with a secure framework acceptable to prison managers (Robertson, 2012). Alexander Maconochie Prison in Australia and Skien Prison in Norway provide computers in cells, and there is pressure to allow email checked by computer programs and staff to enable communication with families (Justice Action, 2011). These tools are not currently in use for impacted children in BC.

ChildLink is a piloted project by CSC which allows children to maintain remote contact with parents via WebEx (Sapers, 2013). This initiative is supported by the Correctional Investigator of Canada across all federal women sites, and maximizing participation is recommended (Sapers, 2013). This program is now being piloted in BC; however, there are issues with a lack of awareness regarding the protocol of the program, as well as limited staff availability, restricting opportunity for youth to participate (personal interview). More attention needs to be placed on building staff training and capacity, and communications options through email and messaging are also advisable.

**Policy Analysis:** Improve Provision of Supplemental Communication Services

This option offers developmental benefits by supporting youth in maintaining or attaining relationships with their parents. This option has benefits to equity and fairness by providing youth the opportunity to connect in-person with their parents, an opportunity
that should be available for all children when possible and desired. This option may have benefits for participation and consultation when youth are consulted on their experiences, barriers, and needs regarding visitation, and provided choice regarding communication options. This option may increase feelings of protection and security among youth by allowing them to establish or maintain relationships with their parents. It may increase government efficiency by building protective factors in the lives of youth, and this option has expert stakeholder support.

There is possibility that with greater investment in this option less resources and attention will be placed on in-person visitation, which is not the goal of this option. Both communication and visitation options should be available to youth, and some experts assert that in-person visitation is essential in facilitating a parent-child bond. The use of new technologies in institutions may be met with resistance by some stakeholders (i.e., members of the public who support a tough on crime agenda). In making the case for this option, the beneficiaries should be emphasized as children and youth, who are otherwise denied the right to regular contact with their parents.

Option 4. Justice-Centred Option

4.1 Account for the Best Interests of Children During Sentencing

Option: Strongly consider the best interests of children in parental court sentencing, with the goal of mitigating unnecessary parental separation for reason of incarceration.

Alignment with interview findings:

A strong theme among experts is the need for keeping families together and preventing unnecessary separation. Experts indicate that the current paradigm of incarceration for non-violent crimes, in institutions far from family at a detriment to children, should be revised. As expressed by one professional: “...anyone who is serving sentence without violence, we need to revisit the idea of putting them away in a secure facility miles away from family...really the vast majority of people I have been working with have serious addictions issues, they need treatment and the family needs to be involved in the treatment.”
Alignment with policy framework:

The UN (2011) recommends that states account for the rights of children with justice-involved parent from the moment of arrest, by all actors involved, including during sentencing. The CRC (UN, 1990) mandates that children be given a voice in all issues of importance to their lives, including the opportunity to be heard in judicial proceedings. UN Resolution 63/241 (UN, 2009) provides that when sentencing or deciding on pre-trial measures for a child’s caregiver governments should prioritize non-custodial measures. The MCFD (2000) Youth Policy Framework identifies that the family is the preferred living environment for youth, and central in provision of affection, care, and support for youth.

Description: Account for the Best Interests of Children During Sentencing

This option recommends progressing towards a justice system that fully considers the impact of sentencing on children of incarcerated parents (Boudin, 2011; Robertson, 2012). Doing so offers benefits in reducing unnecessary parental separation from children. Courts should identify whether convicted individuals have children, and then examine the impact of sentencing options on them (Robertson, 2012). Conditional sentences that are least damaging to the child should be primary considerations, which are generally non-custodial sentences (Robertson, 2012). Turney and Wildeman’s (2015) findings indicate that incarceration is most harmful to children when parents are serving short sentences, incarcerated for a crime that did minimal or no harm to their children, and when there are inadequate family supports for coping with the incarceration. The authors suggest interventions other than incarceration for low-level offenses (Turney & Wildeman, 2015).

Courts should have guidance documents available on how different sentences impact children (Flynn et al., 2015), how children have layered oppressions, and the importance of parent-child attachment. These guidelines can be supplemented by existing best practices such as “Court Craft” sessions that foster inter-agency communication to remove ambiguity around a children’s place in sentencing (Flynn et al., 2015). To account for children, child impact statements or assessments emerge as a practical measure to help judges consider the best interests of the child (Loureiro, 2010).
There are examples of other jurisdictions that account for children in sentencing, such as Department of Corrections Washington State (DOC-WA) which has a conditional sentencing option to respond to parents and children (Christian, 2009; DOC-WA, 2014). Washington State’s Family and Offender Sentencing Alternative (FOSA) applies to parents of dependent children found guilty of non-violent offences. FOSA represents a formal recognition that children are affected by sentencing policy, and it allows parents to serve a 12-month period of community custody as an alternative to imprisonment (Flynn et al., 2015). Parents must meet criteria to apply, and comply with conditions and regular monitoring by the court (DOC-WA, 2014). Similarly, Italy allows mothers to spend part of their sentence in home detention if they have children under 10, have already served a third of the sentence, and are not at-risk for reoffending (Robertson, 2012). These examples illustrate the feasibility and practicality of this option.

**Policy Analysis: Account for the Best Interests of Children During Sentencing**

Maintaining close parental attachment relationships is a major protective factor in the lives of children. This option offers developmental benefits by working to prevent parental separation, which has knock-on effects in other aspects of youth lives. Regarding equity and fairness this option presents benefits by seeking to provide youth with the opportunity to maintain full in-person relationships with their parents, as other youth may have. This option may have benefits for participation and consultation when youth are consulted on experiences, barriers, and needs in developing protocols and guidelines. Further, this option may increase feelings of security among youth by preventing family upheaval due to incarceration. It may increase government efficiency by building protective factors in the lives of youth, and this option has stakeholder acceptance.

This option may have trade-offs with stakeholder response, among members of the public that subscribe to a tough on crime ideology and want harder punishments for offenders, despite the impacts on children and youth. That said, other stakeholders who advocate for prisoner and family rights support this option (personal interview).
Chapter 9. Recommendations and Implications

Implementing the following recommended policy options will prospectively improve the lives of thousands of vulnerable youth in BC. It is expected that more at-risk youth will develop inner abilities and social tools of resilience, thereby providing greater personal development with positive cascading effects. With these abilities and tools, youth will have improved facility to thrive, and to give back to the community, including others facing similar formative experiences of adversity.

The choice and recommendation of options are informed by the evidence in the literature and background review, views of experts who work in the field of practice, and alignment with societal objectives. Each option emerges from analysis as worthy of policy application and is organized by time-frame of future implementation, and listed in order of implementation. All options play a role in the big picture of supporting youth and building protective factors in different environments; options can be implemented in part from each time-frame, or in full.

Short-Term

Short-term options are integral first steps that are necessary for both evidence-based policy, and policy that is inclusive of the voice and experiences of impacted youth. These options should be implemented with due planning and development, and continue into the future once established. It is possible to develop and launch these options within the space of a year, if political will and adequate staff resources are available.

1. (Option 1.1) Increase Youth Empowerment through Consultation and Engagement

2. (Option 1.2) Integrate Information Collection and Sharing Protocols

Intermediate

Intermediate options are envisioned for implementation after establishing short-term options. These options may benefit from the prior application of short-term options, generating increased data and input from youth, although intermediate options are tenable as standalone options. These options are important for the wellbeing and resilience of
youth by providing greater social awareness, support, and facilitating contact with important adults and peers.

1. (Option 2.2) Provide Training and Promote Awareness among Educators

2. (Option 2.1) Support Youth Peer-Mentoring Programs

3. (Option 3.1) Enhance Visitation Environment and Parent-Child Programs

4. (Option 3.2) Improve Provision of Supplemental Communication Services

5. (Option 1.2) Promote Child Rights Advocacy at National and Provincial Levels

**Long-term**

Long-term options are important systemic and institutional changes required for the wellbeing of impacted children. Changes to judicial process and procedure may take extended time and legislative change to achieve. Supporting social and economic wellbeing of families is a diffuse path requiring multiple actions, but perhaps the most important option in beginning to address socioeconomic factors that underpin incarceration.

1. (Option 1.1) Account for the Best Interests of Children During Sentencing

2. (Option 1.4) Support the Economic and Social Wellbeing of Families

**Alignment with Policy and Provincial Priorities**

By implementing the recommended policy options BC will better adhere to the UN’s (1990) CRC, overarching provincial Families First (Gov. BC, 2011) agenda, and provincial Youth Policy framework (MCFD, 2000). Impacted youth are at-risk, with multiple layers and challenges, and require policy attention. In order to fully meet the obligations of international policy and provincial mandates, the government must acknowledge, engage, support, and provide meaningful resources to youth of incarcerated parents.

By implementing these options BC will be an international leader in responding to the needs of these children, which number an estimated 180,000 to 350,000 across Canada. The province will also gain capacity to develop evidence-based policy through
youth consultation and greatly improved data. The province will know the number of youth impacted in BC, and information will be available to enhance interventions.

**Expected Societal Outcomes**

Through adoption of these recommendations, youth who have an incarcerated parent will have improved opportunity: to visit their parent(s), to communicate with their parent(s), to develop socially and emotionally, to build resiliency and other protective factors, to have a say in decisions about their lives and in policy, and to feel financially, emotionally, and physically secure. These options will help support the current generation of vulnerable youth and future generations to come. Contributing to the social and economic of families, and enhancing the consideration of children in sentencing may also help stymie the rate of incarceration, and help cease the damaging legacy of incarceration.

The target is to reach and benefit all impacted youth, and outcomes for this population specifically include:

1. **Development**
   - Greater developmental outcomes of both innate developmental factors, and academic and professional achievement among all impacted youth.

2. **Equity and Fairness**
   - Larger proportion of impacted youth being offered supports and services early, and none falling through the cracks.

   - Improved number of service options that are culturally appropriate and tailored, especially for Aboriginal youth.

   - Youth are able to fully exercise their rights as enshrined in international policy.

3. **Participation and Consultation**
   - Greater engagement opportunities for all impacted youth regarding services/supports, and policy/protocol decisions.

4. **Protection and Security**
• Increased proportion of youth reporting financial, emotional, and physical security in their lives.

5. Efficiency

• Superior integration and data sharing processes, ensuring that supporting professionals have the information needed to assist youth.

6. Stakeholder Satisfaction

• Positive satisfaction with policy changes from a range of stakeholders, including impacted youth.

With the provision of the recommendations options, impacted youth will receive enhanced support, helping them improve capacity for resilience with positive cascading effects on life outcomes. Youth with incarcerated parents have abundant capacity for successful outcomes, and this will be strengthened with the suggested policy options above.
Chapter 10. Conclusion and Next Steps

There is paucity of knowledge regarding the distinct experiences of youth with incarcerated parents in Canada and BC, and across all jurisdictions research with a focus on resilience is limited. Incarceration is a less salient issue in Canada than elsewhere, and researchers may be unaware of the need to work directly with impacted youth, or dissuaded due to the difficulty of working with such a vulnerable population. Some authors (e.g., Johnson & Easterling, 2015) are beginning to acknowledge the benefits of focusing on preventative strength-based approaches that bolster resilience among vulnerable children, rather than concentrating on the maladaptive symptoms of parental incarceration. This research study sought to extend knowledge within this discourse, by providing a literature review exploring the division in focus between resilience and the symptoms of incarceration, a background review of policy response to the issue, insights from expert interviews with a range of roles in the field, and analysis of policy options which fit within a positive youth development framework.

The aim of this study is to promote the acknowledgement and consideration of the presence, experiences, challenges, and strengths of children and youth with incarcerated parents. Interventions should recognize youth for their strengths to persevere, and the impacts they sustain from a culture of incarceration. Regarding first next steps in policy it is important that the government creates greater opportunity for youth voices, inviting youth to take greater participatory presence in policy. It is also crucial that the government collect and share information so that service agencies are able to make evidence-based decisions.

Contributions

This study is distinct for focusing on resilience and strength-based policy solutions on the topic of children of incarcerated parents in BC. Further, expert interviews of practitioners from a range of positions in the field of practice are not located in domestic literature, and so these findings are unique. Expert interview findings confirmed the typology of challenges presented in BC literature (e.g., McCormick et al., 2014), and moved beyond to explore key debates and measures to support resilience. Experts emphasize the importance of parental contact and family supports above interventions.
focusing on the youth in isolation to promote resilience. Policy suggestions to support child wellbeing include strengthening protective factors of adult-child bonds through visitation, communication, parent training, mentoring, and family support, as well as integrating service provision and improving data collection. This study identified key interventions that are expected to constructively assist youth with resilience and positive life outcomes.

In addition, this capstone examined the requirements for direct engagement with youth, such as the need for relationship-building over time to develop trust, working with the population to develop methodology on their terms, and giving back during the research process through volunteering and sharing the research in a youth-accessible format. Youth of incarcerated parents may encounter intense stigma in daily life and find an interview uncomfortable and undesirable, so working with them to develop a youth-friendly method is essential. Such efforts will help identify youth-defined measures of resilience and positive outcomes, and will also build resilience among youth participants by increasing youth self-perceptions of confidence and competence.

**Further Research**

Canada requires domestic research on this issue, and particularly participatory research with impacted youth. There are no Youth Participation Action Research (YPAR) studies involving youth of incarcerated parents available, despite impacted youth being experts and well-placed to help others going through the same issues (Robertson, 2012). The available literature models on adult mentors, and the possibility of exploring and developing youth peer-mentoring programs is promising, and prime for YPAR.

In addition, there is opportunity for further study on the benefits of cultural resilience, and developing associated supports. Specifically, there is need for more research on the impacts of incarceration specifically on Aboriginal children communities, and culturally appropriate programs to help. The nature of adaption and resilience is also an area requiring further research, including how different ways of coping are more beneficial than others for child wellbeing (Johnson & Easterling, 2015). The relational effects of gender on resilience is also an area needing further examination (Jordan, 2014), as well as the impacts of extended family member incarceration (Nichols & Loper, 2012). Intersectional policy analysis would also be a contribution to the field, examining the
differences among children of incarcerated parents, and policy interventions that are
cognisant of multiplicative and simultaneous oppressions and privileges.

Next Steps

The importance of sharing information emerges as a central finding in expert
interviews, and this idea extends to sharing academic knowledge. The findings of this
capstone are available for expert participants and youth to access, and will be shared with
interested non-profit, academic, and government actors. The goal of enhancing
knowledge in the community and helping to amplify the voices of youth, is only possible
with such communication. The goal of making a difference is also only realizable with the
help of the many passionate and dedicated members in the community of practice.

Individuals and organizations seeking change can enhance the receptivity of these
options and this issue with a policy window opportunity in the future, as well as with
advocacy and the ongoing readiness of policy champions (Kingdon, 1984). By continuing
to build knowledge through research, and awareness building in the community of
practice, policy champions will be positioned to effect change when the opportunity
coalesces. This research is intended to be of use to youth and others from other
professional and personal backgrounds, who wish to effect change on this issue.

Concluding Statement

BC has a duty to better support youth of incarcerated parents, not only because
they are members of society and future contributing adults in communities, but also
because it is normatively just. It is just to devote commensurate or greater attention to
vulnerable minors who experience distinct adversity as a result of incarceration policy and
culture. Particularly since BC children with incarcerated parents may be separated by
great distances and find it incredibly difficult to maintain a bond. It should be “part and
parcel of how we do justice” (personal interview). BC must consider the wellbeing of
children of incarcerated parents and provide support and services to ensure wellbeing and
positive life-outcomes. With improved support youth can gain a fair starting point in life,
instead of countless hindrances. Policy action and further research with this population is
needed, it is up to government and society to make the change.
References


Appendix. A

Summary of UN Day of General Discussion (DGD) on Children of Incarcerated Parents (2011)

1. Effects of incarceration on children:

States should account for the rights of children with a parent in prison from the moment of arrest, by all actors in involved, and at all stages (including during sentencing).

2. Children’s right to development and non-discrimination:

Measures should protect children from stigmatisation (including by ensuring privacy), and guarantee that children can maintain direct and regular contact with incarcerated parents.

3. Family issues:

Children have the right to visit parents regularly; visits should be subsidized, and visits should be respectful to child’s dignity, privacy, and schedule. Visits should be conducted in a child-friendly environment and for durations that are conducive to relationship building.

4. Respect for the views of the child:

States should account for the views of children to in decisions affecting them.

5. Information sharing:

States should collect and maintain records of the number of children of incarcerated parents, and make this data available to support providers.

6. Alternative means of communication:

In addition to in-person visits, states should ensure regular contact between parents and children through communications methods, with non-prohibiting costs.

7. Training of professionals:

Professionals in the justice system, education, and social services should receive training to provide appropriate support to children of incarcerated parents.
Appendix B.

Information Letter – Youth

Information Letter to Youth


Hello,

I am a second year student in the Master of Public Policy program at Simon Fraser University. I am doing research to find solutions that are meant to help kids and youth with incarcerated parents. The purpose of this research is to listen, to understand your experiences, and to form solutions that can be shared with the community. I will not be asking about your parents, why they are incarcerated, or were incarcerated before. I will be focusing on you, and your story.

I am inviting youth ages 14-18 with a parent who is currently, or was incarcerated before, to join me for an interview. Joining an interview is up to you, and there will be no impacts to the services you receive if you decide to join or not to join one. For youth who are siblings, you have the option to be interviewed together if you would like.

The research will take 45 minutes, and will be done in-person at a safe location. Location options include youth drop-in centres and non-profit offices. Interviews will occur in November and December 2015. During the interview, you will have the chance to talk about and share your experiences, needs, and ideas for how to make services better. These interviews will be conducted by myself, and are confidential, private, and de-identified (this means that your name will not be printed or published in my study).

The study may be beneficial because you will have a chance to tell me your opinions and share your story. Your participation in research may help the greater community. You will be taking part in research that may assist others who want to help, like non-profit organizations and advocates.

The risk for taking part in the study is that some of the questions may be uncomfortable to talk about. You can skip questions, take a break, and end the interview at any time. The interviews will be done in a private room with community support staff available, who can provide help if you decide you want any.

The results of the study will be presented in my final report. The report will be available for you to read in May or June 2016. Confidentiality is important and your name will not be shared with anyone at any time. Transcripts will be de-identified (names and identifying information removed). Audio records will be deleted after transcription (typing out everything that was said). Transcriptions will be deleted in two years’ time. The finished report will be shared with members of the community. I also plan to write articles, and materials for non-profits based on the results.

All youth of incarcerated parents are invited to participate. A $15 giftcard will be given to each participant. If you are interested, and/or have any questions or concerns please email me at [redacted] Thank you, I look forward to hearing from you!

Best wishes,

Linda Mussell
Graduate Student, Public Policy, Simon Fraser University
Appendix C.

Information Letter – Experts

Information Letter to Expert Interview Participants


Dear Reader,

I am a second year student in the Masters of Public Policy program at Simon Fraser University. I am conducting my capstone research on identifying policy solutions to better support children of incarcerated individuals in British Columbia. The purpose of the study is to gain better understanding of youth experiences and to identify and analyze policy solutions and recommendations. I am seeking to gather knowledge and solutions from professionals who are decision-makers, or who advocate, research, or work on behalf of these children and youth. Minors with incarcerated parents are a group who warrant more policy attention, and your comments will be very helpful in identifying and analysing policy options.

Your participation is voluntary, and there will be no detriment in declining to take part in the study. The research will consist of one 45 minute interview by phone or Skype. Interviews are anticipated to occur in November and December 2015. During the interview you will have the opportunity to share knowledge about youth with incarcerated parents, the nature of current policy services, protocols and supports, and suggestions for how to make things better. These interviews will be conducted by myself, and are confidential. You can request to not be identified by name in my study.

Your voice will be heard, honoured, and featured in a policy project on an important issue. Your shared knowledge will also be of benefit to the child welfare community (research, non-profit and government) by contributing to research on a topic with significant research gaps. Your participation will have the benefit of providing you with an outlet to express your opinions on an issue of professional and/or personal significance to you.

The results of the study will be presented in my capstone project. I plan to reference the study results in newspaper articles and peer-reviewed journal publications, and to share the key findings and recommendations with members of the child welfare community. The capstone will be publically available for everyone, including participants, to access and read. Confidentiality is highly valued and you have the choice to be identified by name in the capstone, or to have transcriptions de-identified. Audio records will be deleted after transcription, and written transcripts will be deleted in two years’ time.

If you interested, and/or have any questions or concerns please contact me at [email protected] I am happy to discuss this project further with you.

Thank you, I look forward to hearing from you!

Best wishes,

Linda Mussell
Graduate Student
School of Public Policy, Simon Fraser University
Appendix D.

Consent Form – Youth

Consent Form for Youth Participants

**Project:** Supporting Resilience: Policy Informed by Youth of Incarcerated Parents in British Columbia.

You are invited to join me, a student researcher, for an interview where we will talk about your experiences as a youth with a parent who has been in prison. The goal of the interview is for me to listen, ask questions, and understand your experiences. The things that I learn in the interview will be used to write about solutions in a report. The report is meant to help the community. I have asked members of Elizabeth Fry Society and Ministry of Children and Family Development to share this study with youth who might be interested in participating.

**Who’s conducting this study?**

My name is Linda Mussell and I am a Master’s student from Simon Fraser University’s (SFU) School of Public Policy. I am doing in-person interviews for my research report, and looking for youth (ages 14-18) who would like to join me for a confidential and private interview. The interviews will be used in my research report. The report will be ready for you to read when it is published by SFU in May or June 2016.

**Why should you take part in this study?**

I am interviewing youth ages 14 to 18, who live in the Lower Mainland or Fraser Valley, and who have a parent who is in prison now, or was in prison before. If that sounds like you, I am inviting you to join an interview to share your experiences, and your opinions about the programs and services available to you. I will not be asking about your parents or any details about them. We will focus on you and your story.

Your comments will be the most important part of my research report, and will help me form policy recommendations. Policy recommendations are ideas for how to make changes in society so that programs and services are better for young people in similar situations to you. Instead of just asking adults and experts to speak for youth, I want to let youth speak for themselves in research. If you have a sibling that is aged 14 to 18, you can choose to be interviewed together.

**Your participation is voluntary**

You have the right to refuse joining this study. If you decide to join, you can choose to withdraw your interview from the study at any time before the study is presented in April 2016. If you choose to withdraw from the study, there will be no negative impacts to any services you receive. You also have the ability to end the interview at any time.

**How is the study done?**

If you are interested in being interviewed, here is how I will do the interview.

1. Contact me at: [Contact Information] with a message to say that you are interested.
2. You need to read and sign the consent form.
3. I will set up a date and time to interview you in November or December 2015, when it is a good time for you.
4. We will meet in a safe location where we can do the interview. Locations include youth drop-in centres and non-profit offices which have support staff who work at them. We will meet in a private room, and you will not be asked to give your identity at the interview location.

5. The interview will last around 45 minutes, but you can choose to stop it at any time.

6. You will be offered a $15 gift card for your time.

7. The interview audio will be recorded so that I can focus on our conversation. You can choose to not have the interview recorded if that is better for you.

8. Your interview will be confidential and “de-identified.” Confidential means that information will be protected so that no one but me will know what you said in the interview. De-identified means identifying information such as your name will be deleted from transcripts (notes from the interview) and not printed in my research report.

9. The audio recording will be deleted right after transcription (typing the interview conversation so that it can be read), and transcripts will be deleted in two years.

10. Interview recordings and notes will be stored on a password protected, encrypted USB stick to protect confidentiality. The USB stick will be kept in a locked drawer.

Is there any way participating in an interview could be bad for you?

When we are talking about your experiences, some topics may make you feel uncomfortable during or after the interview. Before I ask any interview questions, we will review a list of topics so that you can tell me the ones you would rather not talk about. During the interview you can take a break, or choose not to answer questions that you do not like. If you want to stop the interview at any time, you can stop it with no negative impacts. If the interview makes you feel sad and you would like to talk to a professional, let me know. I can help connect you with an onsite support staff to talk to, or a counsellor at Child and Youth Mental Health. After you go home, if you decide you need help right away, please contact the Crisis Center (1-800-784-2433) or online support (www.youthinbc.com).

People at interview locations may see you enter the interview location. However, your name and other identifying information will not be shared with anyone before, during, or after the interview. Interview information will be password protected, and your identity and privacy will be protected.

What will happen if you want to talk to trained support staff?

Support staff will be available in the office during the interview, and right after the interview. You can ask me to get staff help for you at any time during the interview. If you would like to talk to trained staff, I will call the staff person by phone from the interview room. The staff person will come to the interview room to talk with you and see how they can help. If you decide you want to talk to someone after you go home, I will give a list of support contacts to keep.

What are the benefits of participating?

Your voice will be heard, honoured, and featured in a research project. Most research does not ask youth what they think, and only adults have a say in research and making decisions. The research may also help others in the community by sharing information.
Will you be paid for your time?
I will offer you a $15 gift card for the time that you take to be in this study.

How will your identity be protected?
Your confidentiality will be respected. You will not be identified by name in the report. Audio recordings will be deleted after transcription, and transcribed notes will be kept for two years and then deleted. Indirectly identifying information (information unique to you) will also be removed from transcriptions. Interview information will be saved on a password protected, encrypted USB, which will be stored in a locked drawer. Information that shows your identity will not be released without your consent, unless required by law.

If stories of abuse or neglect of a child or an elderly person are mentioned, I will be required to report this information to the authorities. If that happens I may need to share the interview recording and transcripts with the authorities. If I believe that you are in immediate danger I will call 911. I will not share private information with anyone unless the law requires me to.

Study Results
The results of this study will be used in my research report. The report will be ready for you to see on the Simon Fraser University Summit website in May or June 2016 (http://summit.sfu.ca). I may also write articles for journals, newspapers, or for non-profit organizations about the research report.

Who can you contact if you have questions about the study?
I am available to answer any questions that you might have about the study, at [contact information]. My Faculty Supervisor, Olena Hankivsky, is also available to answer questions at [contact information].

Who can you contact if you have concerns about the study?
If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact Dr. Jeffrey Toward, Director, Office of Research Ethics [contact information] or [contact information].

Future use of participant data
Your data will only be used in the research report, and not for future projects. You will not be contacted after the interview.
Participant Consent and Signature

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving reason and without any negative impact on your access to future services.

My signature below indicates that I have received a copy of this consent for my own records.

My signature indicates that I consent to participate in this study.

________________________________________  __________________________________________  ____________________________
Youth Signature                               Youth Printed Name                              Date (yyyy/mm/dd)

I grant permission for interview audio to be recorded Yes ☐

                                                No ☐
Appendix E.

Consent Form – Experts

Consent Form for Expert Interview Participants


You are invited to participate in a phone or Skype interview for a research study on the topic of children with incarcerated parents in British Columbia. The purpose of the interview is to gather your knowledge and opinions to help inform policy analysis, policy recommendations, and build knowledge on this issue. I have also asked organizations such as Elizabeth Fry Society to share this project with impacted youth, and will be conducting interviews with youth as well.

Who’s conducting this study?

My name is Linda Mussell and I am a Master’s student from Simon Fraser University’s (SFU) School of Public Policy. I am conducting phone and Skype interviews for my final capstone project, and seeking participants who would like to join me for a 45 minute interview in November and December 2015. Your interview will only be used for the purposes of research, and the capstone will be a public document once it is published by SFU in May or June 2016.

Why should you take part in this study?

I am seeking to interview Canadian professionals who are decision-makers or who research, advocate, or work of behalf of children and youth with a parent that is currently incarcerated, or was incarcerated before. You are invited to take part in this research study because I want to gain understanding about your knowledge and opinions regarding the experiences, challenges, services, and supports available to children and youth who have a parent with a history of incarceration.

Your comments and opinions will drive the policy recommendations that I form in my capstone, namely key ideas for how to make policy changes in society so that programs, services, and protocols are improved for legal minors of incarcerated parents.

Your participation is voluntary

You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw from the study at any time before the capstone is defended in April without any negative consequences.

How is the study done?

If you are interested in being interviewed, here is how I will do the study:

1. Contact me at [redacted] to indicate interest in participating.
2. Sign and return this consent form, or provide verbal consent at the start of our phone/skype interview.
3. I will set up a date and time to interview you in November or December 2015, according to dates and times that are most convenient for you.
4. The interview will be conducted by phone or Skype, depending on your preference.
5. The interview will last around 45 minutes, but you can choose to stop it at any time.
6. The interview will be audio recorded so that I can focus on our conversation, but you have the right to refuse it being recorded.
7. Your interview will be confidential. You can choose to be identified by name in the capstone, or to have the interview data de-identified. De-identified means that identifying information such as your name will stripped from the transcripts and not printed in my capstone.
8. The audio recordings will be deleted after transcription, and transcription notes will be deleted in two years’ time.
9. Interview recordings and notes will be stored securely on a password protected and encrypted USB drive to ensure your confidentiality. The USB drive will be stored in a locked drawer.

Is there any way participating in an interview could be bad for you?

I do not think there is anything in this study that could harm you or be bad for you. The topics of discussion will not vary greatly from those you encounter in your professional work. I will run the interview questions/themes by you ahead of the interview to give you a chance to anticipate and refuse to discuss any topics. If you do feel any emotional distress and would like to seek assistance, please be aware of the Crisis Centre of BC which is available at 1-800-784-2433.

What are the benefits of participating?

Your voice will be heard, honoured, and featured in a policy project on an important issue. Your shared knowledge will also be of benefit to the child welfare community (research, government, and non-profit) by expanding knowledge on a topic with significant research gaps. Your participation will have the benefit of providing you with an outlet (de-identified if you wish) to express your opinions on an issue of professional and/or personal significance to you.

Remuneration

There will be no remuneration offered for participating in the interview.

How will your identity be protected?

Your confidentiality will be respected. You have the choice to be identified by name in the capstone, or to have the data de-identified (name removed from transcripts). Audio recordings and transcribed notes will be kept on a password protected, encrypted USB drive. Audio recordings will be deleted immediately after transcription, and transcription notes will be retained for two years’ time and then deleted. Information that discloses your identity will not be released without your consent, unless required by law. Due to the nature of phone and Skype calls, privacy may not be guaranteed.

If incidents of abuse or neglect of a child or an elderly person are revealed during the interview, the researcher will be required by law to report this information to the appropriate authorities.

Study Results

The results of this study will be reported in a graduate capstone. The capstone will be available for the public and participants to view on the Simon Fraser University Summit website in May or
June 2016 (http://summit.sfu.ca). The researcher may write articles for newspapers and peer-reviewed journals, or for non-profits referencing the capstone results.

Who can you contact if you have questions about the study?

I am available to answer any questions that you might have about the study, at

My Faculty Supervisor, Olena Hankivsky, is also available to answer any questions at

Who can you contact if you have concerns about the study?

If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact Dr. Jeffrey Toward, Director, Office of Research Ethics, or

Future use of participant data

Your data will be used in the capstone, and not for other future purposes. You will not be contacted again in the future, unless you want me to send you a copy of the finished capstone.

Participant Consent and Signature

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving reason and without any negative impact on your access to future services.

My signature below indicates that I have received a copy of this consent for my own records.

My signature below indicates that I consent to participate in this study.

Participant Signature

Participant Printed Name

Date (yyyy/mm/dd)

I grant permission for interview audio to be recorded: Yes ☐

No ☐

I grant permission to be identified by name in the research study: Yes ☐

No ☐
Appendix. F

Support List for Youth

Support List for Youth


Support during the interview

If during the interview you feel any emotional difficulties, please let me know. If you would like I can connect you with onsite support staff who are trained to help, or a counsellor at Child and Youth Mental Health.

- A list of Child and Youth Mental Health offices is also available online: (http://www.mef.gov.bc.ca/mental_health/pdf/offices_services.pdf)
- A list of Aboriginal Child and Youth Mental Health offices is available online: (http://www.mef.gov.bc.ca/about_us/aboriginal/delegated/pdf/agency_list.pdf)

Support after the interview

If you experience emotional difficulties and need immediate psychological help after the interview, please contact either the:

- Kids Help Phone (1-800-668-6868, http://www.kidshelpphone.ca) A 24-hour toll-free service offering confidential phone or web counseling.
- YouthinBC (www.youthinbc.com) A 24 hour anonymous support chat online.

If you are not experiencing an emergency, but want to talk to someone about getting support, here is a list of resources:

- If you are a student, your teacher and school counsellors are professionals that can listen and connect you with resources.
- Crisis Line Association of BC's Mental Health Information Line Provides support to British Columbians and is answered at all times. You can get support and information on a wide range of mental health challenges. (310-6789 no area code needed)
- Elizabeth Fry Society Saturday Club Children and youth with a parent in the justice system are welcomed at day-long supported activity programs each Saturday during the school-year. (1-888-879-9593, website: https://www.elizabethfry.com)
- Crisis Centre BC Provides Wellness Workshops for Youth, and a Mindfulness program. (email: youthworkshops@crisiscentre.bc.ca, website: http://crisiscentre.bc.ca/youthworkshops)
• Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre
  Offers help to youth and families on mental health and/or substance use challenges. You can talk to a professional and find options for support and treatment within BC.
  (1-800-665-1822, website: http://keltymentalhealth.ca/)

• Aboriginal Child and Family Development
  Offers support specifically for Aboriginal children, youth, and families, and is affiliated with First Nations bands throughout the province.
  (http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/about_us/aboriginal/delegated/pdf/agency_list.pdf)
Appendix G.

Interview Schedule – Youth

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for Youth Participants


Review the material contained in the Consent Form with the participant and confirm consent.

Interviewer introduction

First I would like to introduce myself. My name is Linda, I am a student studying in Vancouver. I grew up in Surrey on a hobby farm with lots of animals, including llamas and goats. I have a younger sister who works in a bakery and is studying to be an art teacher. I like to go dancing and go hiking in my spare time.

1. Would you like to tell me a little about yourself?
   • Do you have any hobbies or sports that you like to do?

Question Screening Section:

I am interested in hearing about your experiences of having an incarcerated parent. We will focus on you and your experiences, and not your parents or any reasons why your parents are or were in prison.

I am going to give you a summary of some of the questions I am going to ask. Then I will ask you if there are things that you would rather not talk about, or that you are really interested in talking about.

Here are the topic areas:

• What are some of the hard parts of having a parent incarcerated.
• Who are some of the people that help.
• What it is like in school.
• What it is like to call or visit your incarcerated parent.
• What was it like when your parent was first incarcerated.
• The things that you do when you feel down
• Things that you are excited about for the future.
• Ideas that you think could help other kids like yourself.

Are there things that you would rather not talk about? Are there things that you are really interested in talking about?

Do you have any questions before we start? Are you ready to begin?

Interview Questions:

2. Can you share with me what it is like to be you? (to have an incarcerated parent)

3. Can you share with me what some of the hardest parts are?

Check-in with participant.

4. Are there some people that help you a lot through the hard stuff?
1. I.e., teachers, support staff, friends, family members.

5. Have you called or visited your parent(s)?
   - What is it like?
   - What is it like to travel to the facility?
   - Are facility staff helpful?
   - What would make it better?

6. Would you like to share how school is like for you?
   - Do your teachers know about your experiences?
   - Do you friends know about your experiences?
   - Do you want your teachers to know about your experiences?
   - Do you have any ideas for programs to help?

7. Are you okay with telling me what it was like when your parent was incarcerated?
   - Were you offered any help or supports at the time?
   - Did you have a hard time getting help?

Mid-interview check-in point with participant.

8. What does it feel like now to have a parent who is incarcerated (or was incarcerated before)?
   - Is it different than before?

9. What sort of things do you do to feel better when you feel down?
   - I.e., peer supports, hobbies, programs, social supports?

10. What are one or two things that you are excited about for the future?

11. If you could talk to the people in charge, what would make life easier for kids like yourself?
   - I.e., programs, public awareness?

12. Do you have anything else that you would like to talk about or share?

Debriefing

How do you feel about the interview?

Do you have any questions about the interview?

Important final information: You can email me before April if you do not want your interview to be in the study anymore. The study will be published in May or June of 2016, and will be available online (the link is in the Consent Form).
Appendix H.

Interview Schedule – Experts

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for Expert Participants


Review the material contained in the Consent Form with the participant and confirm consent.

Reminder: We will not talk about any specific individuals or cases in the interview. I am interested in your overall experiences, impressions, and opinions.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Questions:

1. Can you tell me about your experiences as a professional/advocate in the field, including how you came to this work?

2. In your opinion, what are some of the key challenges for youth with incarcerated parents?

3. What are some of the negative impacts of having such experiences?

4. What have you observed as some protective factors in the lives of these youth?

5. How have you seen children/youth positively deal with having to go through the experience of having a parent(s) incarcerated?

6. What do you think about the supports that currently exist for children and youth of incarcerated parents (e.g., at time of arrest, during incarceration, and transition out of incarceration)?

7. What are your thoughts on youth experiences with family visitation, specifically?
   - What would make it better?

8. What do you know about the experiences these youth have at school?
   - Are there things that would make it better?
   - Should teachers and other staff know about children having an incarcerated parent?

9. Are there specific gaps in support that you think need more attention?

10. In your opinion, what policy changes are needed to better attend to the needs of this vulnerable population?

11. Do you have any final comments?

12. Are there any other professionals that you think might be interested in an interview?
- If applicable, explain the protocol of sharing the opportunity to participate with other experts.
- Expert interviewee would forward the recruitment email message and attached information letter and consent form to expert(s) they think might be interested.
- The prospective expert interviewee will contact the researcher if interested in scheduling an interview or learning more.

**Debriefing**

The interview data can be withdrawn before the capstone is defended in April at your request. The capstone will be published in May or June of 2016, and I can share it with you if you would like. If you are interested in me writing a summary of the key capstone results for sharing in your organization, I am available to that for you. Do you have any questions, comments, or feedback about the interview?
Appendix. I

Thematic Analysis Code List

*Expert Interviews*

Total: 10 interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expert’s role in the field</td>
<td>Direct experience in field of practice</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Direct experience working one-on-one with impacted youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key life experiences of youth</td>
<td>Multiple challenges (e.g., ethnicity, poverty)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In foster care</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cycle of parental incarceration</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parental substance misuse, and/or mental health challenges</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Long-term parental separation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges for youth</td>
<td>Social stigma</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Separation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difficulty in school</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quality of contact with parents</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Life uncertainty, “uprooted”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited contact with parents/family</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trauma</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social isolation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Labelling, trying to fit in</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Repeat experiences of parental separation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional stress</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lack of information on parent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative impacts of challenges</td>
<td>Increased risk to successful development</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disproportionate impacts on Aboriginal children</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Intergenerational trauma</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Getting into trouble/delinquency</td>
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<td>Triggering mental illness</td>
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<td>Unable to adapt the same as young children</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not willing to seek help (stigma)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Contact with Youth Justice system</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difficulty in forming identity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Protective factors</td>
<td>Connection to parents</td>
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<td>Contact with family</td>
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<td>Connection to a caring adult</td>
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<td>Peer support</td>
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<td>Community support</td>
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<td>Connection to culture</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mentoring support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation in decisions</td>
<td>Support workers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supports needed for youth</td>
<td>Family support</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What needs to change (policy)</td>
<td>More parenting support</td>
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<tr>
<td>How to achieve change</td>
<td>Building research base</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barriers to achieving change</td>
<td>Issue does not command enough public sympathy</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

111
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lack of political interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current policy is not impactful, little is in place</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contrasting ideas of what is best for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception that this is a narrow issue &amp; not many are impacted</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix J.

Summary Reflexive Analysis

When approaching the topic of youth and children of incarcerated parents I am aware that my own identities played a role in my choice of the subject, analysis of the issue, and engagement with participants. This brief reflexive analysis is provided with the goal of enhancing understanding of the research decisions in this project, and how my participation may have influenced interview data. Three identities are provided in this discussion: my age, gender, and elements of my upbringing. This discussion is by no means exhaustive, but intended as a succinct window of insight.

Identifying as a young person in my twenties I am drawn to topics impacting persons close to my own age, including youth, and feel an affinity through common experiences. I have had my own experiences of encountering difficulty in being heard, and I developed a long-standing interest in making youth voices central to my policy research. Due to my age, future youth participants may feel comfortable speaking with me and sharing their experiences. Conversely, youth may feel an even closer affinity to a younger interviewer than I, perhaps a peer. Expert interviewers may have felt comfortable speaking with an interviewer of my age, due to the latent power differentials of age, while also free to speak in technical terms due to my educational background.

As a young woman, interview participants may have found me less intimidating and felt more open in sharing knowledge and understanding with me. This may be common among expert interviews, and may be expected in future youth interviews as well. That said, male youth participants may feel slightly less comfortable speaking to me about experiences specific to their gender, and female youth participants may feel more comfortable sharing with me.

As a woman it is possible that I am socialized to be drawn to topics impacting families and children. However, it was a cognisant decision to begin reading on this topic and I was initially drawn to its intersections with justice, as well as relationships with individuals in the field. I also developed an interest in this topic due a long-standing curiosity in seeking to understand why some children achieve balance and positive life
outcomes, and others with similar experiences of adversity do not. The question is not purely theoretical, but also personal for me.

Due to challenges in my own formative background I continually feel drawn to researching issues impacting vulnerable populations. I felt an affinity with youth participants due to having some similar life components with some of them. My ability to leave the trappings of academe and the middle-class may be of future benefit when having conversations with youth. That said, my ability to perform the language and demeanor of academe and the middle-class may also have benefited me when speaking to expert participants. As I am drawn to advocacy for marginalized populations, I may have also found greater affinity and ability to facilitate conversations with the experts interviewed. My experience and understanding of non-profit and government workspaces, and placement as a Masters’ student, may also have been of benefit when establishing contact with experts for interviews.

In sum, as a researcher I am present in this capstone through my research choices, as well as active participation in interviews. Following a constructionist paradigm this is not an inherently negative recognition, and rather is something important to recognize and identify for a more complete understanding of the research on whole.