

Insights from prison research with mothers

Does a prison-based social worker help
where there are child welfare concerns?

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Social workers for mothers in prison pilot

- Approximately 310,000 children in England and Wales each year are affected by the imprisonment of a parent.
- Lord Farmer's review (2019) recommended having a social worker based in women's prisons.
- Pilot project led by prison charity Pact at HMP Send and HMP Eastwood Park.
- Prison-based social worker aims to support mothers where there are child welfare concerns.



3-year evaluation 2021 to 2023: data sources

94 mothers

19 prison staff

2 prison-based
social workers

2 prison
observations



22 community
practitioners

4 children /
carers

2 key
informants

<https://twitter.com/HmpSend>

The mothers and their families

- 94 mothers originating from 56 local authorities.
 - 249 children linked to the mothers.
 - 101 children's social workers allocated.
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- 29% reported social services involvement as a child, compared to 1.15% across UK.
 - Most were single or separated – and 63% of siblings were separated.
 - 46% reported no contact with their children at referral.
 - 48% were in legal proceedings relating to their children, or needed legal assistance.



Do prison-based social workers make a difference?

- Complex work – and it differs in each prison.
- High level of satisfaction from mothers (91%) - significant given mistrust of social workers.
- Contact issues were resolved for 88% of the mothers where this was an issue (68% had a contact plan; 20% were supported with no contact in the child's best interest).
- Increased utilisation of the Mother and Baby Unit (MBU) at HMP Eastwood Park.
- Prison-based social workers play a significant role in supporting mothers identified as being at risk of self-harm (35%) – concerns often related to children.
- Prison staff report being upskilled in “*the legal landscape*”.
- Community practitioners report children being more settled.
- Policy makers are interested – Government (MoJ/HMPSS) has taken over funding prison-based social workers and extended the pilot.



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