

<b>Institution:</b> University of Huddersfield		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA 20 Social Work and Social Policy		
<b>Title of case study:</b> The COPING project: Improving the welfare of children of prisoners		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2009–2015		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Professor Adele Jones Dr Bernard Gallagher Kathryn Sharratt	Professor of Social Work Reader in Social Work Senior Lecturer in Criminology	07/2007–present 01/2007–2020 11/2009–present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2013–2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>An estimated 2.1 million children within the EU are separated from a parent because the adult is incarcerated. The COPING project – a Pan-European study led by the University of Huddersfield – has shown these children are exposed to triple jeopardy through break-up of the family, financial hardship and extremes of stigma and secrecy. For many, this has led to adverse social, emotional and educational outcomes. COPING has influenced new developments in policy and practice globally in order to tackle this adversity. This included policy at the UN Human Rights Council and Crime Commission, UNICEF and the Council of Europe, both directly and via NGOs. COPING was also the basis for training of charities, police and the judiciary in Romania, Uganda and the UK.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>An estimated 2.1 million children within the EU are separated from a parent who is incarcerated; sometimes both parents are in prison. The COPING project was initiated within a policy context in which these children were marginalised and largely invisible and, in the first Pan-European study, studied the effects on them of parental imprisonment. It took a child-centred approach and focused on their mental health and resilience.</p> <p>The research was led by Professor Adele Jones, Professor of Social Work (since 2007) and University of Huddersfield colleagues: Dr Bernard Gallagher, Reader in Social Work (2007–2020), and Kathryn Sharratt, Senior Lecturer in Criminology (since 2009). The EU-FP7 funded project (2009–2012) comprised a multidisciplinary consortium of 10 NGO and research partners from six countries with expertise in child and adolescent mental health, psychology, social work, criminology, human rights and sociology.</p> <p>Four countries (Germany, Sweden, Romania and the UK) were chosen for the research to ensure a diversity of penal and child welfare systems and to reflect variation in imprisonment policy and practice. For example, the UK had the fastest growing prison population while Sweden had fewer prisoners relative to population size, and shorter sentences. There were a number of interrelated elements to the study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A self-reporting survey of 730 children and parents which investigated coping strategies and mental health problems.</li> <li>• In-depth follow up interviews, conducted across Germany, Sweden, Romania and the UK, with a representative subset of 349 children and parents.</li> <li>• A systematic mapping of interventions across partner countries.</li> </ul>		

- An analysis to integrate the findings and extract need dimensions, which were compared with a theoretical framework.
- Stakeholder consultation, including face-to-face interviews, focus groups, telephone interviews and an on-line questionnaire, with 122 professionals and groups. These included: care-givers; residential care staff; social workers; prison staff; NGO staff; children of prisoners; imprisoned parents; government and NGO staff involved in policy; and school-related stakeholders.
- A public engagement and dissemination strategy to provide a vehicle for the release of emerging findings.

The findings indicated that the children of parents who are in prison were exposed to triple jeopardy through break-up of the family, financial hardship and extremes of stigma and secrecy, which led, for many, to adverse social, emotional and educational outcomes. It identified that the children were likely to need extensive support and that they had additional needs compared to other children, such as ambiguous loss and disrupted attachment [3.1].

Gender differences were identified. Girls seemed at particular risk of internalising difficulties (emotional problems), while boys were more likely to externalise them, leading to behavioural and conduct problems. Key factors relating to children's resilience included: children's innate qualities; the importance of family stability; and sustaining relationships with the imprisoned parent. The data indicated that children's resilience was closely linked to open communication especially around the imprisonment and that children needed opportunities to discuss their experiences.

The children were found to be at significantly greater risk of mental health problems than their peers in the general population. Twenty five percent were at high risk of mental health problems, rising to near 50% of children in Romania. The support of a care-giving parent and extended family was central to good mental health and resilience, while schools played a key role, functioning as a major source of stability at a time of upheaval and disruption.

Generally, children did better if they were able to maintain good quality contact with the imprisoned parent [3.1,3.2]. Appropriately equipped child-centred visiting and regular, easily accessed contact which maintained the child–parent relationship were identified as essential for children's well-being. Maternal imprisonment often resulted in insecure care arrangements and increased financial hardship for the child. Paternal imprisonment often meant a child lost contact with their father even though our results indicated the father–child relationship was equally important.

COPING highlighted that mainstream child and adolescent mental health services had little understanding of the needs of these children, and in all countries the study found a lack of cooperation between criminal justice and child welfare agencies [3.1]. Most agency support for these children was provided via NGOs. Specialist services were scarce and, within Romania, non-existent. In an attempt to improve this, a set of 12 comprehensive recommendations were drawn from the research. They focused on establishing child-sensitive justice systems with actions for the judiciary, governments, the police, social services, NGOs and prisons [3.1,3.3].

The project undertook more than 150 public engagement and dissemination activities across Europe. These enabled the Huddersfield team and their partners to directly influence stakeholders at the global (UN), transnational (EU) and national level. The 'end-of-project' conference (2012) was held in Brussels, with an audience of EU parliamentarians. It prepared the ground for the impacts described in this case study, and featured an address by Baroness Hale of Richmond, who said "*The important lesson to emerge with the COPING research is that everyone who plays a part [...] needs to recognize the needs of these children and make proper provision for them. This research is vital to introducing these matters to the wider policy agenda.*" A Senior Policy Adviser at UNICEF Brussels, said: "*The research has made the invisible children visible.*"

### 3. References to the research

*The outputs listed below stem from research funded by a highly prestigious source (EU FP7), which used mixed-methods sequential research (a standard for rigour in the discipline) and explored diverse social, criminal justice and welfare contexts across four countries.*

**3.1 Jones, A., Gallagher, B.,** Manby, M., Robertson, O., Schützwohl, M., Berman, A.H., Hirschfield, A., Ayre, L., Urban, M. and **Sharratt, K.** (2013) *Children of Prisoners: Interventions and mitigations to strengthen mental health*. University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield. ISBN 9781862181168. <http://childrenofprisoners.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/COPINGFinal.pdf>

**3.2** Manby, M., Jones, A.D., Foca, L., Bieganski, J., and Starke, S. (2015) Children of prisoners: exploring the impact of families' reappraisal of the role and status of the imprisoned parent on children's coping strategies, *European Journal of Social Work*, 18:2, 228-245, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2014.888051>

**3.3 Jones, A.D** and Hirschfield, A. (2015) Child-sensitive Justice for Children of Imprisoned Parents, in: Mahmoudi, S. (ed.) *Child-Friendly Justice: A Quarter of A Century with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Brill-Nijhoff Publishers: Sweden. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004297432\\_011](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004297432_011) [can be supplied on request]

### 4. Details of the impact

The research findings and the recommendations of the COPING project have shaped policy, legislation, practice, organisational structures, attitudes, and political thinking at the international, national and regional levels in government, NGOs, the police and judiciary.

Regarding impact, the project has:

1. Informed national, European and international policy leading to increased awareness and advocacy
2. Enabled training and capacity building
3. Underpinned improvements in services and practices

#### **Informed national, European and international policy leading to increased awareness and advocacy**

The COPING project has enabled and informed policy impacts within the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the UN Human Rights Council and the UN Crime Commission and Congress. COPING partner, the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO), ensured that the issues covered by the research were relevant to stakeholders in the UN, and provided a direct route for communicating the project findings and recommendations.

In Scotland, the Support for Children (Impact of Parental Imprisonment) Bill (2015) used the COPING findings as a primary source of research-based evidence [5.1]. In Italy, a Memorandum of Understanding, signed in 2014 and extended in 2016, outlined the measures to be taken in order to protect and respond to the rights and needs of [the] children of prisoners [5.2].

The Deputy Children's Ombudsman of the Council of Europe said (2020): "*the findings of the COPING research were particularly helpful to me in developing the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021)*" [5.3]. The research was invaluable in furthering Children of Prisoners in Europe (COPE)'s advocacy around the importance of the relationship between a child and their imprisoned parent and the need for a multidisciplinary approach. The Executive Director of COPE wrote in 2019, "*the research paved the way towards the Council of Europe [recommendation] concerning children with imprisoned parents, which offer the first prison-based guidance focusing specifically on the rights of children*" [5.4].

### Enabled training and capacity building

The COPING dissemination strategy helped raise awareness with relevant NGOs. COPING partner, Alternative Sociale, became the first NGO in Romania to focus on the needs of children of prisoners due to their involvement in the project. Between 2013 and 2015, they trained professionals on the needs of children of prisoners and in 2016 ran a special educational project in Iași to support children separated from parents as a consequence of detention. Alternative Sociale used the COPING results as a catalyst to transform the visiting rooms in Iași and Vaslui Penitentiaries so that they are child-friendly, alleviating the traumatic experience of seeing the parent again in a detention space. This led to a Civil Society award from the Romanian Government [5.5].

In the UK, from December 2018 to December 2019, associated with their national information centre on children of offenders (i-HOP), Barnardo's used the COPING evidence to develop and implement a toolkit in schools in South Wales [5.6].

In Uganda, the research has been the source of training materials for study weeks (throughout the assessment period) by Wells of Hope, which cares for children whose parents are on death row, serving a long sentence, or living with HIV while imprisoned. The Founder of Wells of Hope charity explained: "...the COPING research influences, validates and informs our work because it highlighted the potential for schools to contribute to the emotional wellbeing of children with imprisoned parents...the COPING research forms a core text in our studies" [5.7].

### Underpinned improvements in services and practices

COPING results have led to numerous improvements and developments in practice. In the UK Barnardo's developed a toolkit (referencing the research) for agencies to support children of prisoners and to tackle the stigma they face. The toolkit was used by COPING partner Partners of Prisoner Support (POPS) to train over 3,500 professionals between 2013 and 2016. As a result of the research, POPS has transformed its services by incorporating the views of children and shifting the focus away from the partners of prisoners and onto children themselves, and in turn has produced briefings for the police, schools and prisons [5.8].

As a result of the research, police in Bavaria adopted a more family-friendly approach when carrying out arrests by providing information on sources of support for families. The Ministries of Justice in the German Federal States of Nordrhein-Westfalen and Schleswig-Holstein initiated support programmes for children of prisoners in light of the findings from COPING, and the State of Nordrhein-Westfalen has created family support centres in five prisons (from 2020). Treffpunkt e.V., the COPING NGO partner in Germany, initiated a project to train professionals on how to engage with children of prisoners and launched a website providing information on services for children of detainees from all over Germany. Written evidence from Treffpunkt e.V. highlights the key contribution of COPING to their work with children: "Our project of outreach work was only established on the basis of the Coping Study and the associated legal regulations in the State Prison Law. Previously, there was no corresponding support process that included the children of prisoners as a separate target group defined by specific problems" [5.9].

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1. Support for Children (Impact of Parental Imprisonment) (Scotland) Bill:

[http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4\\_MembersBills/Consultation\\_Document\\_\(Website\).pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_MembersBills/Consultation_Document_(Website).pdf)

5.2. PC\_CP Draft report Children of Prisoners (2017)

5.3. Testimonial Croatia Ombudsman (2020)

5.4. Testimonial Executive Director COPE. PDF pp.1,2

5.5. Alt Sociale <https://www.alternativesociale.ro/sprijinirea-copiilor-separati-de-parinti-o-nevoie-constantina-nu-un-fenomen-trecator/> (details of educational project) +

## Impact case study (REF3)

[http://www.alternativesociale.ro/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/downloads\\_raport%20anual%202013%20ro.pdf](http://www.alternativesociale.ro/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/downloads_raport%20anual%202013%20ro.pdf)

(details of award)

**5.6** Barnardo's Invisible Walls toolkit, p.6 <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/invisible-walls-accord-toolkit>

**5.7.** Testimonial Wells of Hope

**5.8** POPS [https://www.nicco.org.uk/userfiles/downloads/886%20-%20i-HOP%20PractitionersGuide\\_Interactive\\_Spreads.pdf](https://www.nicco.org.uk/userfiles/downloads/886%20-%20i-HOP%20PractitionersGuide_Interactive_Spreads.pdf) (numbers) +

<http://www.partnersofprisoners.co.uk/training/> + <http://www.partnersofprisoners.co.uk/coping/> (for example of briefing to police)

**5.9** Impact COPING Study Germany PDF p8, 25